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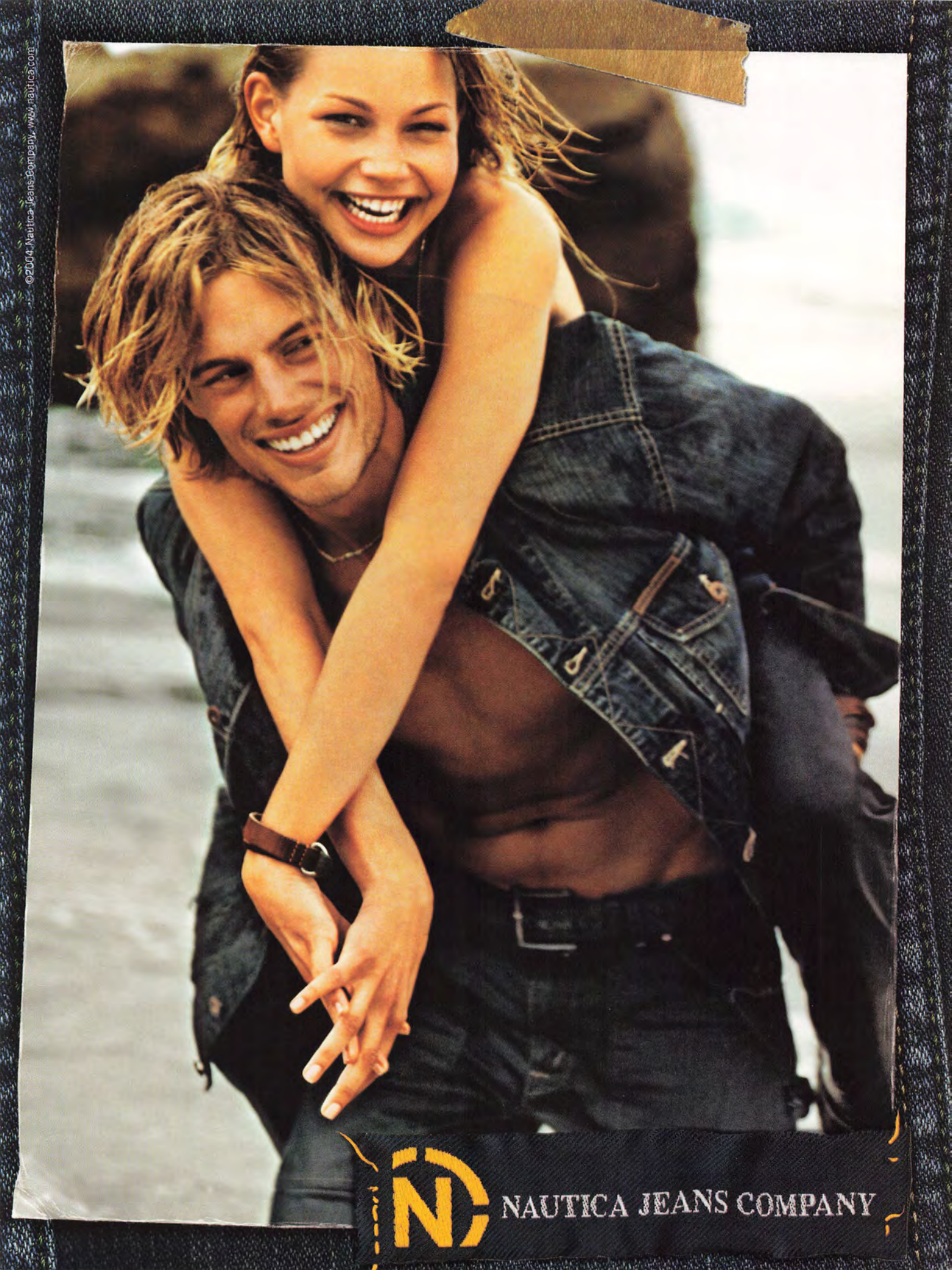
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Sheryl Nields

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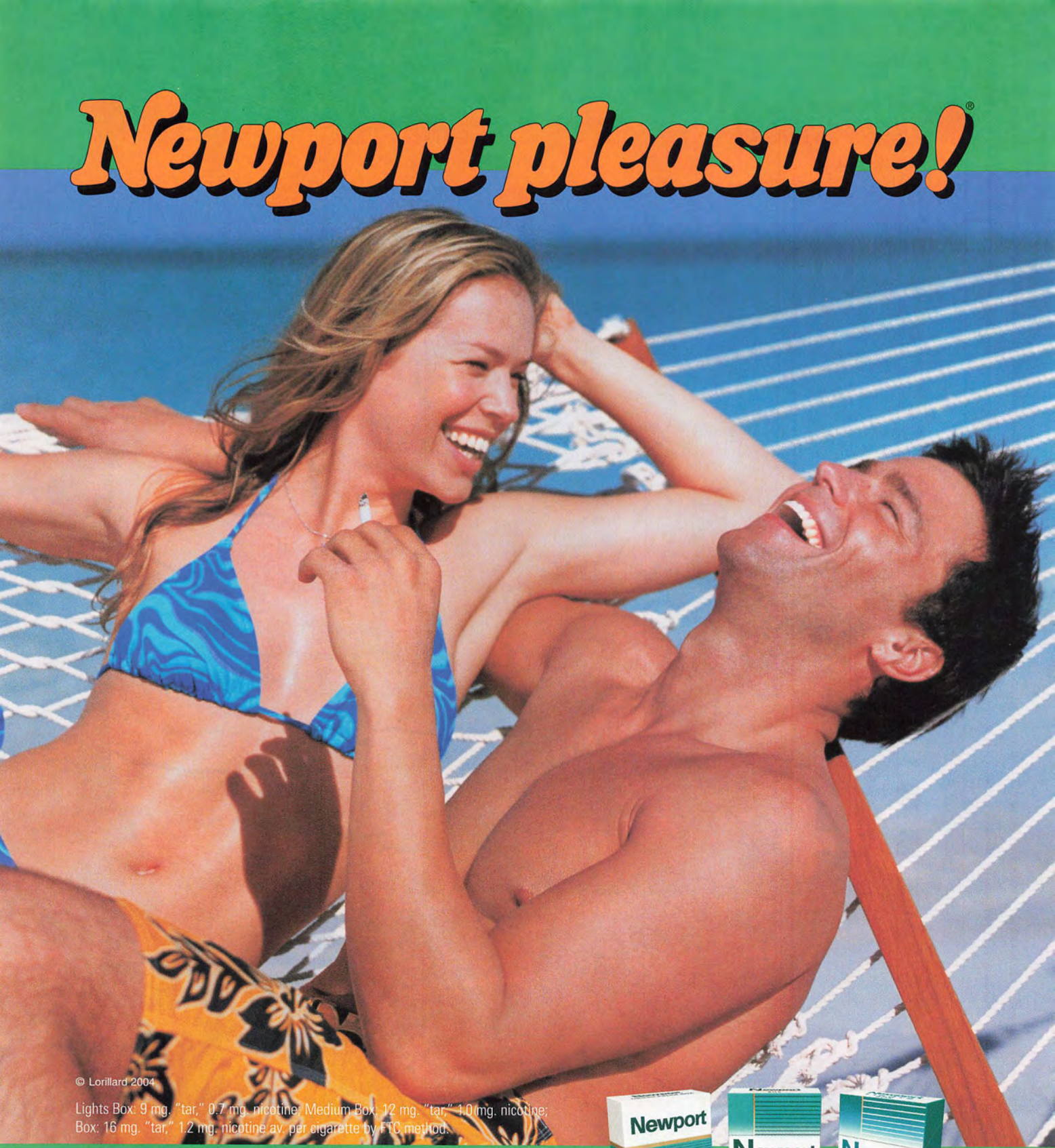

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Gered Mankowitz (Kate Bush at Mankowitz's Studio, Great Windmill Street, London, Summer 1978)

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Horsing Around!

TO FIND OUT how hot Dave Chappelle is right now, just throw a rock at a crowd of people. Chances are you'll hit someone talking about one of the comedian's hilarious rock star–related sketches. (Chances are you'll also be arrested, but the company lawyers have assured me that's really not my problem.)

Whether enlisting the help of John Mayer to prove that white people can dance — just not very well — or re-creating the cocaine-crazed antics of funk superfreak Rick James, *Chappelle's Show* on Comedy Central has cornered the market in music-oriented mirth — a view shared by celebrity fans Outkast, 50 Cent and Interpol. Which is why, when it came to compiling this year's Blender 100 list of the hottest things in music, we didn't think twice about putting him at number 1.

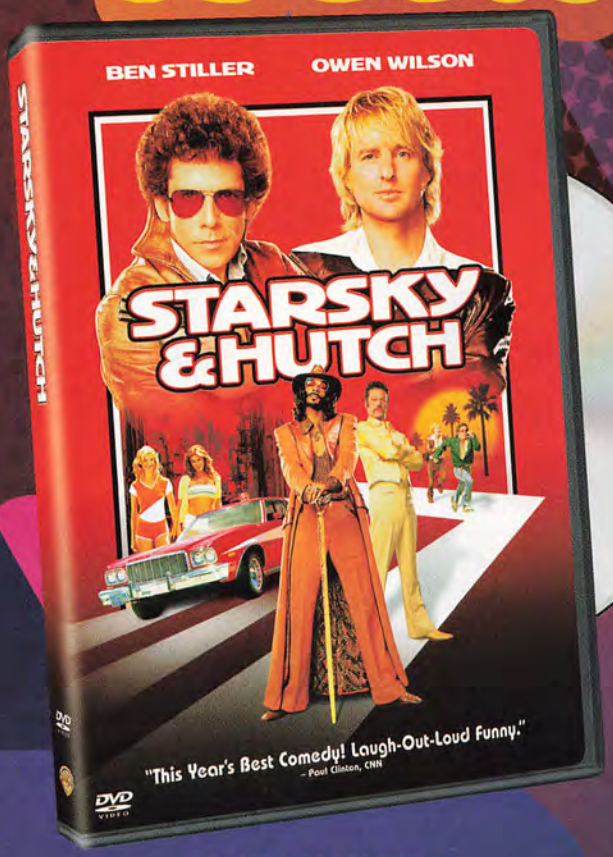
Personally, my favorite part of the show is when, without explanation, a peculiar-looking fellow wanders across the screen doing what I'm told is called "the robot." In an attempt to improve office morale, I myself have taken to doing said "robot" at the start of editorial meetings. By their open mouths and stunned silence, I can tell my staff are all extremely impressed. Thanks, Dave!

Enjoy the issue!

ANDY PEMBERTON
EDITOR IN CHIEF

Chappelle has cornered the market in music-related mirth.

It's Huggy Bear's World



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EVERYONE'S A WINNER

The lyric printed on the spine of your June/July issue — "Won't come back from Dead Man's Curve"— was from the song "Dead Man's Curve," by Jan & Dean. A nice tribute. Do I get a prize?

GILL OAKES, SPRING, ILLINOIS

Actually, you do!

UPSIDE-DOWN LYRIC

The upside-down lyric you printed on the last page of your June/July issue — "Not everyone can carry the weight of the world" — is from R.E.M.'s "Talk About the Passion," off their fantastic first album, *Murmur*.

RAY WHELAN, NEW BRUNSWICK, NEW JERSEY

WEIRD

I love your magazine. I want to have hot, sweaty, never-ending, all-night-long, 164-page sex with you.

JEREMY SHEPHERD, BATES CITY, MISSOURI

You know what? Some people just can't seem to grasp the meaning of the term *restraining order*.

BEST MAGAZINE EVER

I've been a *Blender* subscriber since day one — you're the best music magazine ever! Kudos for the recommended tracks to download that now grace your reviews section — good upgrade. Let's call it *Blender 2.0*.

ULBERT TUGUNG, VIRGINIA BEACH, VIRGINIA

We would. But apparently we can't afford to print new business cards.

MY ASS FELL OFF

Your 50 Worst Songs Ever list [May] made me laugh my ass off like a hyena as I was riding the train back home (much to the chagrin of my fellow passengers)! As a 44-year old wedding-band musician (someone has to pay the bills, kids!), I continue to be appalled at the drivel that rises to the top of the charts, which means that my band must play this audio trash ad nauseam. However, you can rest assured that every once in a while, a tune like "My Heart Will Go On" or "The Greatest Love of All" will rear its ugly head as some couple's chosen wedding song. Overall, I would rather shove red-hot pokers into my eyes!

J.R. FRONDELLI, BALDWIN, NEW YORK

Hey, are you available for bar mitzvahs?

★ Congratulations to the winner of *Blender*'s May Crossword contest, who walks away with a bitchin' Audiovox flat-screen TV: Stacey Hazlett of Britton, Michigan! *Yeah!*

LISTEN UP!

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Janet Jackson: What's the appeal?

James White (Jackson); LFI (Right Said Fred)

YOU ARE CRAZY

If Janet Jackson thinks that her interview in *Blender* for your cover story ["America's Most Wanted," June/July] is going to be the last time that she has to address this February's Super Bowl fiasco, she's crazier than her brother.

JEREMY FURLOUGH, FOLEY, ALABAMA

Crazier than Tito? Man, you're tripping!

Right Said Fred: Wrong, said everyone else.

HATE-MONGERING RAG

Hey, *Blender:* Do you realize what your 50 Worst Songs Ever list has done to the music geeks of the world? I just happened to read the reaction on a few music-related message boards — you would swear that some of these geeks were about to cry or something, all because you insulted their favorite bands! Just what kind of insensitive and hate-mongering rag do you publish? Definitely my kind of music magazine — don't change a thing. I haven't laughed so hard in ages!

RONNIE DANNELLEY, ATLANTA

WASH YOUR HAIR IN PEE

Loved the Vanessa Carlton interview in your 2004 Summer Preview ["I Want →

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Hey, Vanessa Carlton, Alanis Morissette wants her shoes back!

to Be Naked," June/July]. She is one saucy lady. But is it really true that it's good for your hair to wash it in pee?

JEANETTE REYES, MAPLEWOOD, NEW JERSEY

Yes. In fact, you should wash your hair in pee right now. Then tell all your friends what you've done. Who cares if they call you "Pee Hair" (or, if you're Native American, "Washes Hair in Pee")?

NOT LONG ENOUGH

The only thing that was wrong with your 50 Worst Songs Ever list is that it wasn't long enough.

BOB GORMAN, DEER PARK, TEXAS

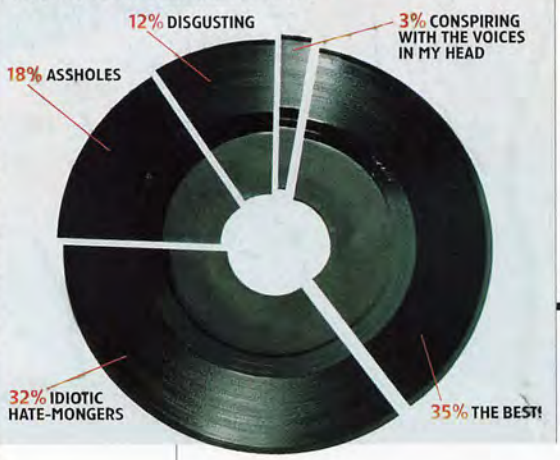
PATHETIC DRIVEL!

Talk about your pseudo-intellectual drivel! Your complaints about the 50 Worst Songs Ever merit a place on the list of the 50 Worst Critiques ever, given that they pander solely to the pathetic "if it dangles, it's pierced" crowd who think that the sound of instruments being dragged across the stage floor is legitimate countercultural musical talent.

LARRY TALLEY, DALLAS

50 WORST SONGS MAILBAG — AT A GLANCE!

"YOU GUYS AT *BLENDER* ARE . . ."



UNBELIEVABLY OFFENSIVE

What you said about the Beatles' "Ob-La-Di, Ob-La-Da" — that it sounds like "the desperately chirpy songs Cockneys used to sing to keep their spirits up while the Luftwaffe rained death on them during the Blitz" — goes beyond offensive. It only exemplifies your complete lack of intelligence. Unbelievable.

DAN DHRUVA, SAN FRANCISCO

I HATE YOU

I don't like you guys at *Blender*. Just thought that you'd like to know.

ANDREW ALLENDER, VIA E-MAIL

Are you breaking up with us?

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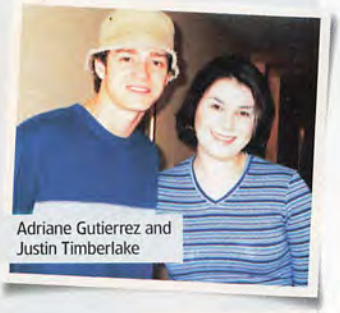
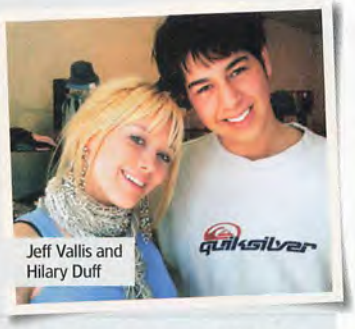


Adriane Gutierrez and Justin Timberlake

Tiffany Wright and Usher



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HISSY FIT

Per your comment that Toby Keith's "Courtesy of the Red, White and Blue" is "so vengeful, it makes 'The Star-Spangled Banner' sound like 'Give Peace a Chance' ": Well, call me vengeful, but 3,000 of my fellow citizens were slaughtered by Islamofascist pigs who'd like nothing better than to subject us all to their brand of oppressive theocracy, and all you can do is have a hissy fit about patriotic lyrics. It does my heart good to know I'm sworn to protect even ungrateful "critics" who write from ivory-tower comfort.

SFC CHERYL McELROY, U.S. ARMY
101ST AIRBORNE, FT. CAMPBELL, KENTUCKY

We genuinely thank you for your bravery. But the song still sucks.

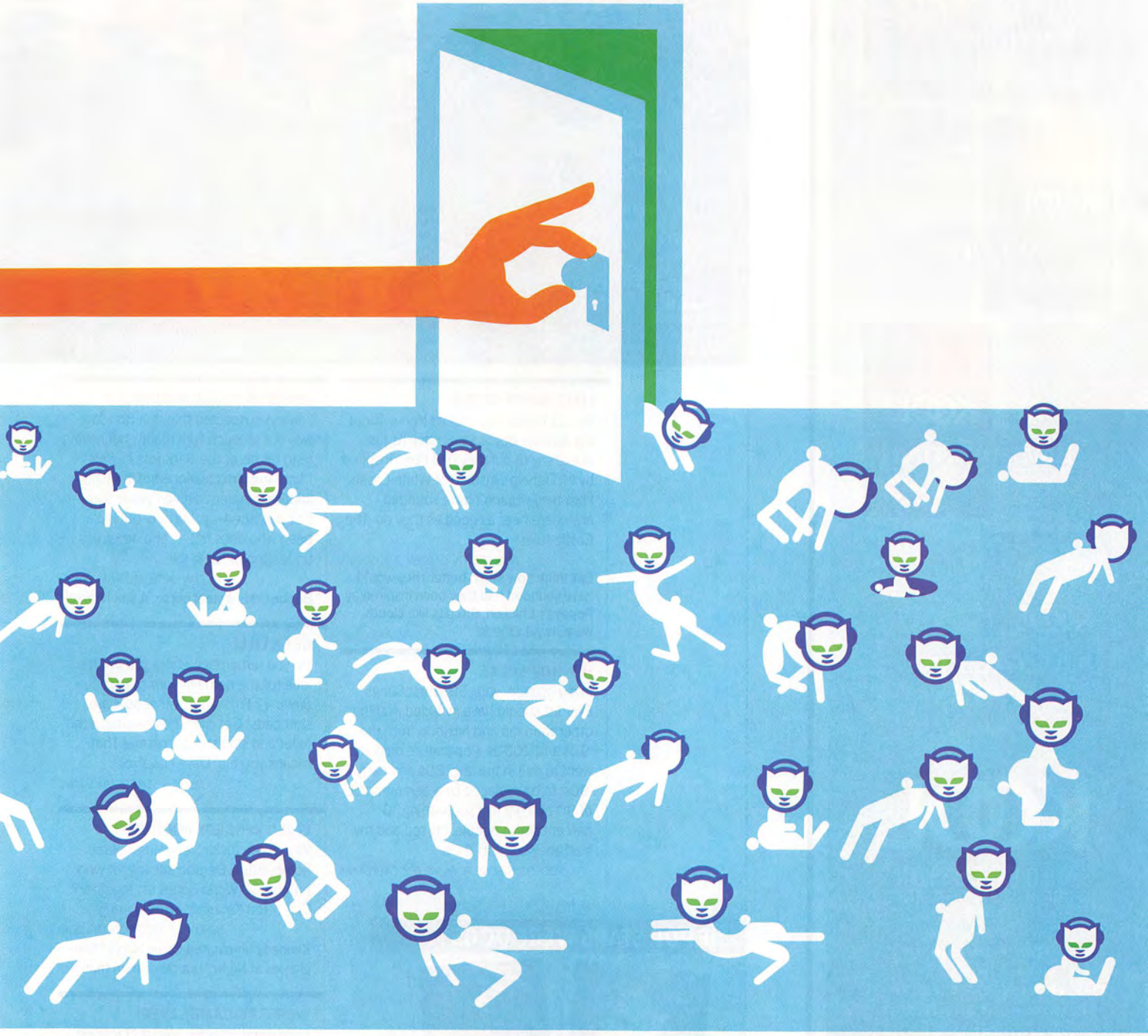
ASSHOLE!

Anyone with the nerve to make such a fucked-up list like your 50 Worst Songs needs to accept the fact that he's an asshole! Let's see *you* write a song.

SKIP DUVALL, INDIANAPOLIS →

Gregg Segal (Carlton)

DOING IT A LOT IS OKAY



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The Beastie Boys fight for their right to wear the same glasses.

I LIKE WHITE CASTLE

Re: 33 Things You Should Know About the Beastie Boys [June/July]: I'd just like to say that if they had been inspired by McDonald's instead of White Castle, I bet they wouldn't have sounded anywhere near as good as they do. The Castle rules!

MIKE SPEROS, GARDEN CITY, KANSAS

But think how much better they would have sounded had they been inspired by Popeye's Chicken. Biscuits like clouds, we tells ya! *Clouds!*

HIP-HOP SUCKS

In my opinion, your 50 Worst Songs Ever list should have included nothing other than rap and hip-hop from the '90s and 2000s. Pop culture died and went to hell in the late '80s and early '90s, to be replaced by a demographic of 90 percent lost souls aping 10 percent street people. My rod and my staff, they comfort thee.

ROD WRATHBONE, PORN VALLEY, CALIFORNIA

JON BON JOVI IS A BURNOUT!

I always suspected that Jon Bon Jovi was out of touch with reality, but having read his dis of the Darkness in your May issue, I'm convinced of it. All his idiotic statement did was prove that he's a washed-up, burned-out has-been who does not — and never has — understood rock & roll.

DAN WADE, AFTON, WYOMING

But he rides a steel horse. A steel horse!

GET A LIFE!

Do you remember where you got the idea for the name of your magazine, *Blender*? From me! You people are shitheads! Get a life, quit playing in the toilet and stop slandering me! That means you too, Dave Navarro!

HEART S. SCHIESS, VIA E-MAIL

IS TED KENNEDY INVOLVED?

Who is the fuckin' left-wing, liberal, homosexual, Democratic faggot who put the 50 Worst Songs list together? Was it Ted Kennedy or John Kerry?

JIMMY COMBS, CINCINNATI, OHIO

Kennedy nominated Corey Hart's "Sunglasses at Night," but other than that. . . .

WORST MAGAZINE EVER!

I just rated *Blender* "Worst Magazine Ever." Just thought you'd like to know.

CHRIS MARTIN, AMHERST JUNCTION, WISCONSIN

And we've just rated you "Not *the* Chris Martin." Touché!

I *REALLY* HATE YOU

"Everybody Have Fun Tonight," the Wang Chung song you cut down as the third worst song ever, is one of my favorites. Why don't you toss yourselves into a blender and liquefy yourselves?

JERRY ROGERS, VIA E-MAIL

Do you see what he did there?

IF POP STARS WERE DOGS . . .

FYNN, THE DOG >>>> BILLY IDOL, THE POP STAR

WIN ME!

DOES YOUR DOG RESEMBLE A POP STAR?

Send us a photo with your name and address, and who your dog is supposed to be. If we print it, you'll win an Audiovox/Virgin Mobile CDM-8610 with an additional $100 of Top Up minutes!

Terry Richardson (The Beastie Boys); courtesy of Bob Thompson (Fynn); Neal Preston/Corbis (Idol)

Tantalizing

MINTRIGUE leaves you guessing as to the secret of its intriguing refreshment

KOOL

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Mintrigue, Caribbean Chill, Mocha Taboo, Midnight Berry KS Box, 10 mg. "tar", 0.9 mg. nicotine; Box Kings, 17 mg. "tar", 1.3 mg. nicotine av. per cigarette by FTC method. The amount of tar and nicotine you get from this product varies depending on how you smoke it. There is no such thing as a safe cigarette. For more information visit **www.bwtarnic.com** ©2004 B&W T Co.

BLENDER

NEXT ISSUE

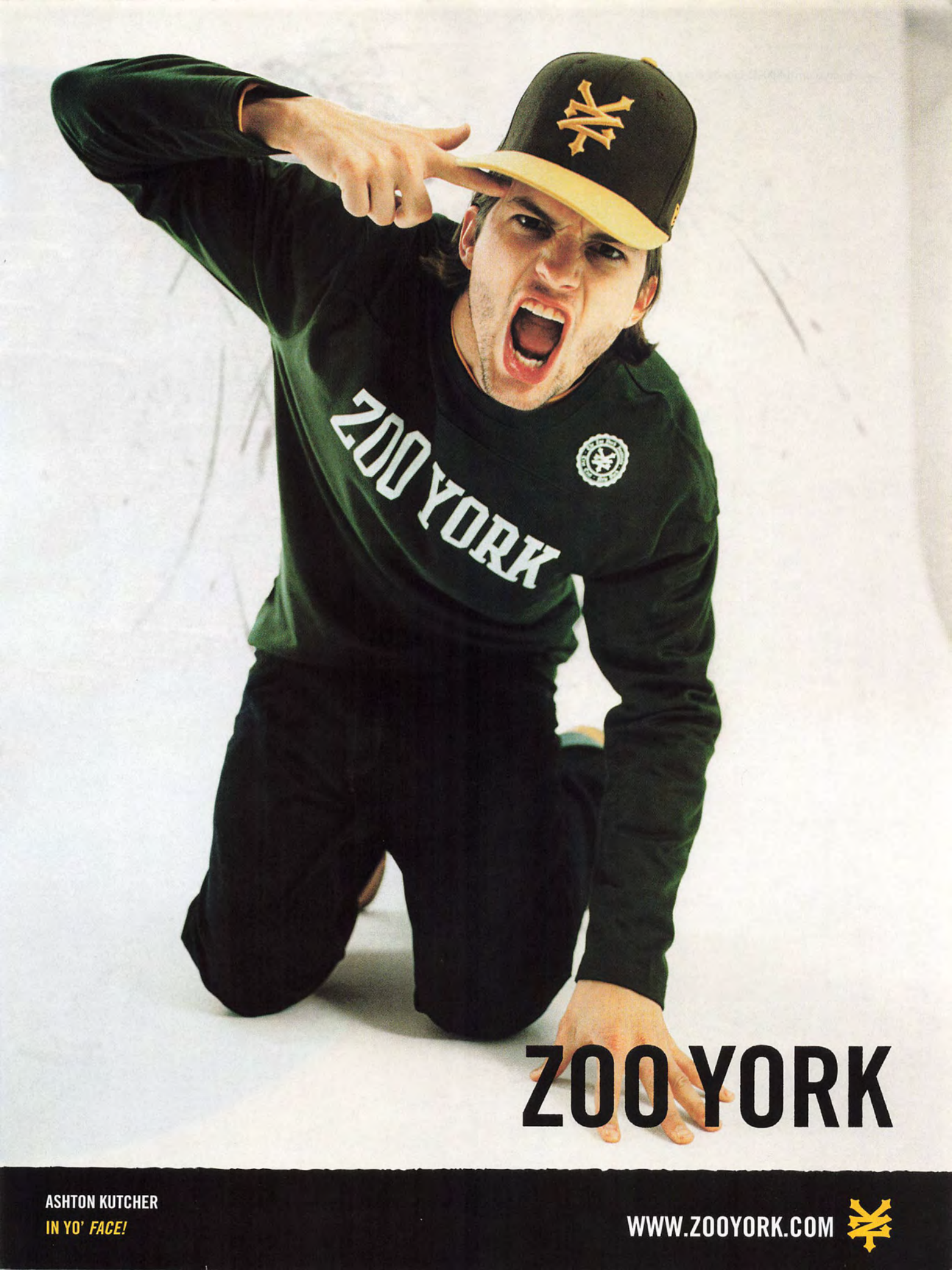
Moment #27

16-year-old Britney Spears dons Catholic school uniform

The Greatest Teenage Moments in 50 Years of Rock & Roll

Photoplay Archives/Corbis (Presley); Alphonse Telymonde (still-life)

ON SALE TUESDAY, AUGUST 17



ASHTON KUTCHER
IN YO' *FACE!*

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★ LIBERTINES ON CRACK ★ JOE PERRY ROCKS ★ SKINNY LADS VS. D12

Kabbalah-palooza!

Blender investigates the faith that's capturing the hearts and minds of the world's pop stars

Posh Spice, Kabbalah's latest devotee

VICTORIA BECKHAM, a.k.a. Posh Spice, is the latest pop star to fall under the spell of the trendy Kabbalah Centre.

The troubled celebrity turned to the sect that's challenging Scientology as Hollywood's dominant new religion after allegations surfaced that her soccer-superstar husband, David Beckham, had been unfaithful.

Described as "a divine system of wisdom," Kabbalah dates back to the thirteenth century and involves an interpretation of the Torah so esoteric, it is traditionally studied only by Jewish family men over 40.

But the version studied by Madonna at Los Angeles's Kabbalah Centre, founded in 1981 by Philip Berg, a former insurance salesman from Brooklyn, is different. It's a non-denominational grab bag of religion and science that promises a positive flow of energy allowing followers to see into the future and also stop the aging process. The Kabbalah Centre even maintains that committed Kabbalists can achieve physical immortality.

Kabbalah is based on the *Zohar*, an ancient Hebrew manuscript said to be too complex even for most eminent scholars. In contrast, Centre devotees "read" it by simply running their hands over the text.

Britney Spears honored the organization with a neck tattoo, though traditional Judaism forbids such body modification. The Centre, however, reasons that "we are given reign over our physical bodies."

A red string, worn around the wrist, wards off the "Evil Eye." Healing water — personally blessed by Berg — is sold for $3.50 a bottle. Madonna claims it cured her husband Guy Ritchie's foot warts.

Though celebrities are rushing to buy red bracelets in time of need, not everyone is impressed with Berg's version of Kabbalah. "Many in the traditional Jewish community condemn this group and even label it a cult," says Kabbalah scholar Rabbi Ariel Bar Tzadok. "Madonna is no Kabbalist. If her teachers have told her that she is, they're using a criterion of definition unique unto themselves and not accepted anywhere else in the traditional Jewish community. Kabbalah is a holy, sacred aspect of Torah Judaism. It should not be cheapened and abused."

Rabbi Byron Sherwin, who has studied Kabbalah for 35 years, is also dismissive of the celebrity hobbyists.

"It's obvious they're looking for something and think they've found it," he says. "A tourist is not a resident. These people are tourists." *BEN MITCHELL*

"Kabbalah is holy and sacred; it should not be cheapened and abused."

"RADIATE BEAUTY TO ALL . . ."

Kabbalah, according to the Los Angeles–based Kabbalah Centre

1 **What is it?**
Kabbalah means *receive*. "It is the way to gain the peace and joy you want and deserve," according to the Centre.

2 **Where is it from?**
Former insurance salesman Philip Berg started modern Kabbalah in 1969 in Israel.

3 **What's with the red piece of string?**
It wards off the "Evil Eye."

4 **And the chicken-swinging?**
Devotees swing a chicken over their head to atone — sins are transferred into the bird!

5 **Do I have to buy a special book?**
Contemplating the three-letter variables in *The 72 Names of God* can "bring money into your life and radiate beauty to all."

6 **Any other texts?**
Though the ancient Hebrew manuscript the *Zohar* is difficult to understand, the Kabbalah Centre insists new devotees can "read" it by running their hands over the text.

7 **Do I have to drink lots of Kabbalah water?**
Yes, for "centuries of wisdom in every drop."

8 **What's all this about immortality?**
Via meditation, adherents alter their DNA and prevent Satan from implanting disease.

9 **Oh, and seeing into the future?**
Once a year, you can see "your metaphysical shadow within your physical shadow," permitting a glimpse into tomorrow and beyond.

10 **Seems a little far-fetched. . . .**
Rabbinical authorities roundly dismiss Philip Berg's version of Kabbalah.

HOW MUCH?!

THE PRICE TAG

Physical immortality and clairvoyance are not cheap . . .

Red string	$26
Prosperity candle	$20
Inspiration oil	$10
Diamond love necklace	$303
Wisdom of Kabbalah six-DVD box set	$69.95
Kabbalah water-bottle holder	$7.99
Immortality book	$24.95
Karen Berg's *Divine Sex* CD	$12.99
"From Chaos to Connection" online course	$19.95
Baby crib set	$280.00
TOTAL	**$774.83**

Source: The Kabbalah Centre, kabbalah.com

This page: X17agency.com (Madonna); Alphonse Telymonde (still-life). Opposite page: Flynetpictures.com (Hilton); Splash News (Madonna, Spears, Jackson); Denis-Vrolpe/X17agency.com (Aguilera)

WHO'S WEARING THE EVIL-DEFYING RED STRING? THESE GUYS!

Madonna, the matron saint of the new Kabbalah

After snogging Madonna, Christina Aguilera appeared with the crimson amulet.

Britney Spears adopted the red bracelet before releasing her latest CD.

Any number of negative forces may have led Michael Jackson to reach for a red string.

Paris Hilton reached for the holy thread after her porno hit the Internet.

FIGHT!

The skinny lads of Franz Ferdinand take on D12's beefy posse

1 Franz Ferdinand and D12 are scheduled to appear on the German *Top of the Pops*. "I walked past the curtain and Eminem was rehearsing," said Franz singer Alex Kapranos.

2 An enraged 400-pound D12 bodyguard tells him to keep walking. "Because of his attitude, I said, 'Says who?' And he said, 'Says me.' It was such a comedy moment."

3 "He came lumbering at me like one of those old wrestlers," Kapranos recalled. "I thought I was gonna go flying, but I just ended up being enveloped by all this flab."

4 Franz's manager knocked the guard's hat off, and guitarist Nick McCarthy punched him in the face. "Everybody went nuts," Kapranos said. D12 refused to comment.

NEWS ROUNDUP!

Poor ticket sales may be behind the cancellation of **CHRISTINA AGUILERA**'s summer tour. The official reason given was her "vocal strain."

MANDY MOORE and **MICHAEL STIPE** have duetted on a cover of the Beach Boys' legendary "God Only Knows" for the soundtrack of *Saved!* — a Stipe-produced movie starring Moore.

PINK is suing an Austrian politician for using her name in campaign leaflets distributed outside her concerts in the country. Foreign Minister Benita Ferrero-Waldner "misused [my] name for a political campaign," Pink claims.

RYAN ADAMS has shut down his personal Web site "until further notice" as a mark of respect for the end of the hit sitcom *Friends*.

WORD!

"I might have a go, and there's a good chance that something will happen."

EAMON, ON HIS TOURMATE BRITNEY SPEARS

Lil' Kim, with the steadiness of a surgeon . . .

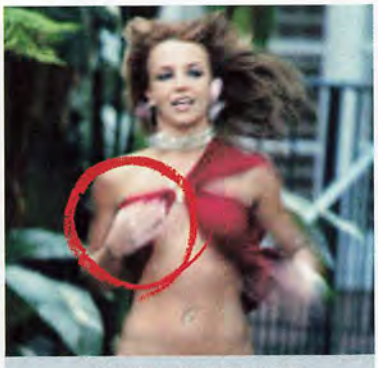
Breast-Clutch!

In the tipsy-topsy world of celebrity, pop stars need to keep their fingers on the pulse, easily accessed via their mammaries

LINDSAY LOHAN

COURTNEY LOVE

JANET JACKSON



BRITNEY SPEARS

John Jay (Franz Ferdinand illustrations, 4); Paul Warner/Wireimage.com (Eminem); RJ Capak/Wireimage.com (Lil' Kim); Mavrix Photo (Lohan); Chris McKay/Retna Ltd. (Love); Kevin Mazur/Wireimage.com (Jackson); X17 Agency (Spears)

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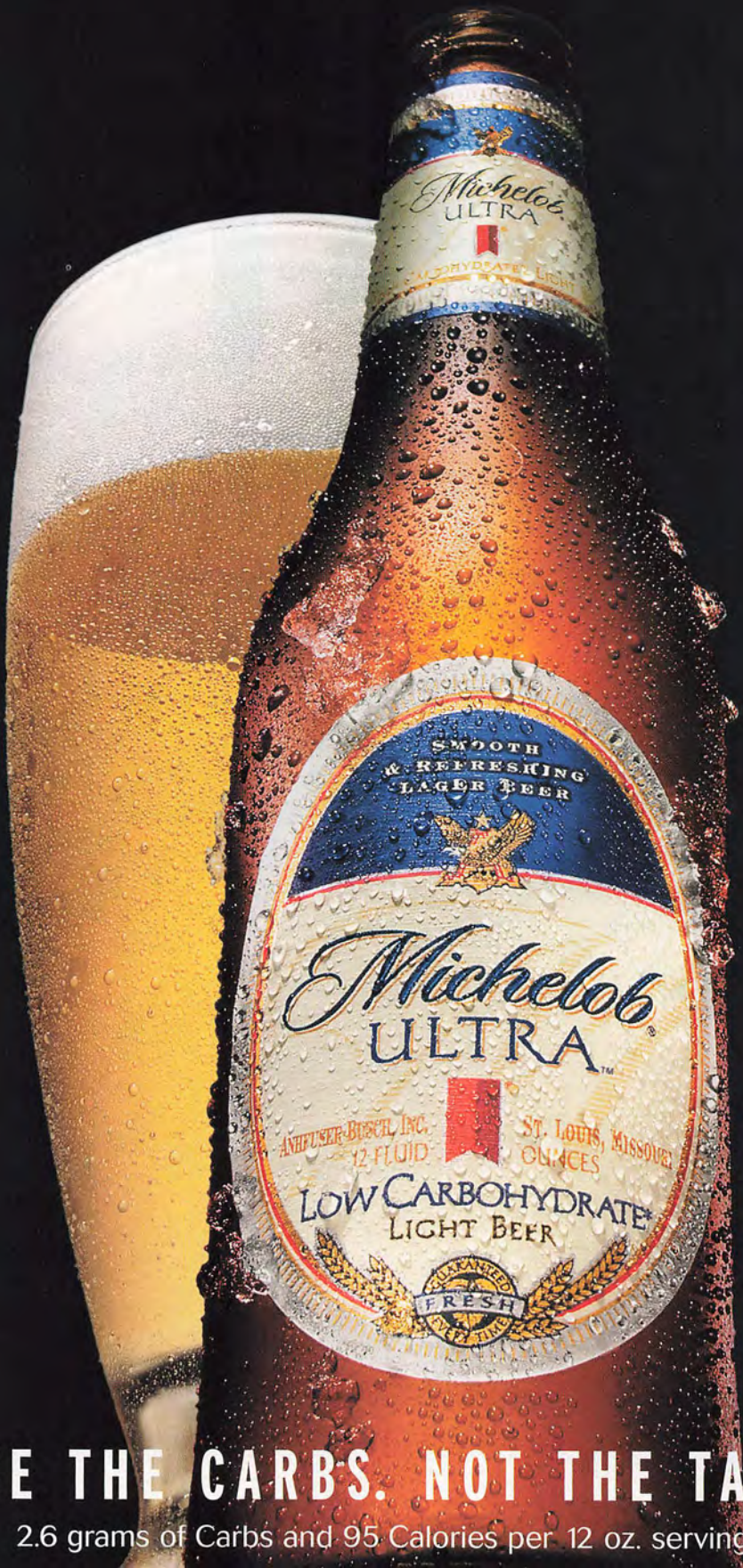

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The Next Big Thing!

Scissor Sisters, from left: Paddy Boom, Ana Matronic, Jake Shears, Del Marquis, Babydaddy

ALL ABOUT US!

MOST DIVA-LIKE DEMAND?
"To be fed on a regular basis."

LYRIC MOST PROUD OF WRITING?
"This'll be the last time I ever do your hair." ("Laura")

RECOMMENDED ACTIVITY WHILE LISTENING TO OUR MUSIC?
"Speed-walking."

TYPICAL NIGHT OF DEBAUCHERY INCLUDES?
"Banana skins and a gallon of Tang."

SCISSOR SISTERS

One singer is "part woman, part gay man" and another sounds like Elton John. How fabulous!

BY NICK DUERDEN
PHOTOGRAPHY BY JOSEPH CULTICE

IT'S MID-AFTERNOON in Manhattan, and Scissor Sisters frontman Jake Shears is shaking off last night's excess. For the past few months, he has been based in the U.K., where his band's debut album has been hailed as an instant classic. Consequently, he's been missing New York's nightlife and is determined to catch up.

"I went to a friend's underwear party yesterday," he croaks. "Great fun: me in a pair of black boots and a jockstrap, three sheets to the wind. Last thing I remember? Hugging the toilet bowl."

Their debut is a glittering package of flamboyant, disco-influenced pop songs.

Shears, a former go-go dancer, is not your typical pop star. "Pop stars in 2004 are so bland and boring! No offense to Justin Timberlake, but he just seems so very uninteresting. I want to be more than that. I want to be multidimensional."

Shears achieves this aim with ease by singing like the Bee Gees swallowing Elton John at a Billy Joel karaoke night on their debut, a glittering package of flamboyant, disco-influenced pop songs that also contains a bizarre version of Pink Floyd's "Comfortably Numb."

The band — Paddy Boom, Babydaddy, Del Marquis, Ana Matronic and Shears, hailing from all over America and aged between 24 and 35 — formed at a New York cabaret show three years ago and, like Jimi Hendrix and Blondie before them, have become famous across the Atlantic before attempting likewise at home.

"I wouldn't be surprised if we weren't as successful over here," says co-singer Matronic, who once described herself as part straight woman, part gay man. "Puritans founded America while the pagans stayed in England. No wonder we're popular over there! But it would bum us out if people thought we were just another gay band; that's just stupid and lazy."

She laughs out loud, sounding not unlike Cher with a heavy cold. "We are here to rustle America's feathers." [BLENDER]

>>> OUT NOW SCISSOR SISTERS *UNIVERSAL*

ON BOOM: VELVET BLAZER BY **JEAN PAUL GAULTIER**, SHIRT BY **MOSCHINO**, SHOES BY **GIUSEPPE ZANOTTI**. ON MATRONIC: DRESS BY **BENJAMIN CHO**, SHOES BY **J. MASKREY**, SHOULDER JEWELRY BY **LARA BOHINC 107**, RING AND EARRINGS BY **NOIR N.Y.C.** ON SHEARS: PANTS BY **SASS & BIDE**, VEST BY **J. LINDBERG**, SHOULDER CORSAGE BY **BODYWORSHIP N.Y.**, CUFF BY **DSQUARED**, BELT BY **ERICKSON BEAMON**, SHOES STYLIST'S OWN. ON MARQUIS: RED SUIT BY **GUIDO**, SHIRT BY **PAUL SMITH**, TIE BY **VIVIENNE WESTWOOD**, WHITE GLOVE BY **LA CRASIA NYC**, SHOES BY **CLOAK**, TIE PIN AND CUFFLINKS BY **EXHIBITIONIST NY**. ON BABY DADDY: PANTS BY **BUCKLER**, SHIRT AND BELT BY **DIESEL STYLELAB**, SHOES BY **CESARE PACIOTTI**, TIE BY **MOSCHINO**, ALL JEWELRY BY **EXHIBITIONIST NY**

Styling: Kurt and Bart for Beauty and Photo; hair: Rogee Drummer at Oliver Pro; makeup: Melanie Harris at Oliver Pro using Make-Up Forever

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The Man Who Could Not Sing

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People first.

Prince: not a man to waste money on Q-tips

Now Hear This

Three music nabobs select songs the world really needs to hear

LUDACRIS
JS, "LOVE ANGEL"

"It's an R&B track that R. Kelly did for these two girls, JS — it's really laid-back and relaxed. The first time I heard it, I realized that R. Kelly doesn't save the best for himself — he works for other artists. That really inspired me. A lot of people slept on this song. It didn't get big because of label problems."

BEBEL GILBERTO
PRINCE, "SOMETIMES IT SNOWS IN APRIL"

"This is a beautiful ballad using only a piano and some small electronic effects. The catchy part is the melodic bridge that Prince repeats. Even if you have a tendency to pay more attention to the music, you can tell how deep the lyrics are. I think it got lost in the middle of *Parade* because it's such a strong album."

BEN KWELLER
MASON JENNINGS, "SORRY SIGNS ON CASH MACHINES"

"I can't believe this song isn't a huge hit — it has one of the best choruses, and his voice is unique and honest. The acoustic guitar sounds like it's right there in the room with you. One of my favorite lines is 'Oh, my God, when you cross your legs beside me.' It reminds me of sitting behind the wheel on the open road next to my lady." *STEVE KANDELL, LAUREN HARRIS*

NEWS ROUNDUP!

Rap legend RAKIM was arrested for unpaid child support minutes before a planned show at New York's Roseland Ballroom. His lawyers protested in court over the arrest's timing, claiming the police could have waited until after the performance. Rakim was cleared of the charges.

BRIAN WILSON will voice the character of a "spiritual adviser" in an upcoming episode of the cartoon show *Duck Dodgers*. Representatives of the troubled Beach Boys legend approached the animators with a request to make a cameo in the series. He also contributes a new song to the soundtrack.

MEL B has threatened a return of the SPICE GIRLS. The five women might reunite, she says, to write a new song for a planned greatest-hits album.

ELTON JOHN has accused *American Idol* viewers of being "incredibly racist" for voting off black singer JENNIFER HUDSON.

WORD!

"Life is not worth living unless there's a camera around."
CARMEN ELECTRA

Kiss, a band that respects the sanctity of women

Simmons brandishing his girl-empowerment pen

Degrading!

Gene Simmons claims Islam "treats women worse than dogs."

★ KISS bassist Gene Simmons has outraged Australia's Islamic community. When the subject of Islamic fundamentalism arose during a recent interview, Simmons said, "This is a vile culture, and if you think that it's willing to just live in the sands of God's armpit, you've got another thing coming."

The Israeli-born 54-year-old then accused Muslims of treating women "worse than dogs." The radio station was bombarded by angry calls. Yasser Soliman, Chairman of the Islamic Council of Victoria, called his comments "very unfortunate."

Simmons, who claims to have had 4,600 sexual partners, has been vocal about his attitudes toward women. He once explained to *Blender* his distaste for ballads "that espouse the notion 'How can I live without you?' Actually, bitch, very easily — I'm gonna do your grandmother, your mother and your sister too." *DORIAN LYNSKEY*

ARRRR!

Johnny Depp wants Keith Richards to play his dad!

Keith (above), Johnny (right)

IS JOHNNY DEPP getting career advice from *Blender*? Could be!

In our review last year of megahit *Pirates of the Caribbean*, it was suggested that Keith Richards, who provided the inspiration for Depp's swashbuckling Jack Sparrow, should play his father in the film's inevitable sequel.

After being approached by Depp, the Rolling Stones guitarist is seriously considering the part. "Johnny was slightly embarrassed by all the *Pirates* praise because he was just being Keith," says a source close to the actor. The film, titled *Pirates of the Caribbean 2: Treasures of the Lost Abyss*, is set for release in 2006. *CLARK COLLIS*

Clockwise from top left: Fin Costello/Redferns/Retna Ltd.; Mariko Shark/Corbis, courtesy of Disney Enterprises, Inc.; Reuters New Media Inc/Corbis; Gary French; Tim Jackson/Wireimage.com; Roberto Ligresti; Mychal Watts/Wireimage.com; Mick Hutson/Redferns/Retna Ltd.

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When Will Your Favorite Pop Star Croak?

BRITNEY SPEARS

CURRENT AGE	**23**
AVERAGE AMERICAN'S LIFE EXPECTANCY	**77**

CATEGORY	YEARS ADDED/SUBTRACTED
White female	+3
Frequent aerobic gyrations, on- and offstage	+3
Personal smoking plus secondary smoke in bars can be toxic	-4
Stress-reducing servants of all kinds (+4); however, the stress of managing them (-2)	+2
Sun worship, leading to possible skin cancer	-4
Looking for love in all the wrong places (promiscuous behavior)	-9
Weight fluctuation	-5
Tabloid mainstay (overexposure to media)	-1
Religious (a faith flip-flopper — Kabbalah, Christianity — but faithful just the same)	+6
Stimulants — Red Bull, obviously — to increase performance and stamina	-4
Ambidextrous. Flips the finger at paparazzi with either hand	+1
ESTIMATED LIFE EXPECTANCY	**65**

PROJECTED YEAR OF DEATH 2046

GERONTOLOGIST DR. DEMKO SAYS: "Britney's escaped her teen-idol years intact, but if she wants to see a healthy old age, she'll need to stop burning the candle at both ends."

NEWS ROUNDUP!

50 CENT has reportedly been attempting to woo **ALICIA KEYS** with continual phone calls. But the rapper has had little success with the soul star. "He's just not her type," says a close friend.

MADONNA was slated to appear on a planned track by electronica legend **APHEX TWIN** — not singing but grunting and squealing like a pig. She canceled at the last minute.

Josh Homme has revealed that the next **QUEENS OF THE STONE AGE** album features a cameo from the Disneyland Marching Band.

Zombie movie legend George Romero is looking for rock icons to star as members of an undead rock band in his new project, *Diamond Dead*. **DAVID BOWIE**, **MARILYN MANSON** and **GWEN STEFANI** are all up for consideration.

WORD!

"I think all the contestants should be put in a cage and sent to Thailand."

MORRISSEY, ON *AMERICAN IDOL*

The actors who have real sex on film!

Black Rebel Motorcycle Club, one of the nine bands in the movie

A rare scene in which the actress is clothed

Explicit!

The most sexually extreme mainstream rock movie ever!

★ THE DANDY WARHOLS, Black Rebel Motorcycle Club and *Blender* 100 stars Franz Ferdinand all perform in a British movie that is being described as the most sexually explicit mainstream film ever made.

Nine Songs shows stars Kieran O'Brien and Margo Stilley having real sex, including oral sex and ejaculation. The controversial scenes are intercut with footage of nine shows they attend at London's Brixton Academy.

"People who have seen it come out of the cinema saying, 'Fucking hell, I can't believe that it's so explicit,' " says O'Brien of the film, which was shown in May at the Cannes Film Festival. Sukhdev Sandhu, film critic for the *Daily Telegraph*, commenting on the "equal opportunity" nudity and reciprocal sex acts, said it was "not a male wank fantasy."

Despite unsimulated sex, it is "not a male wank fantasy."

While the bands gave permission to be filmed, there is some doubt about whether they knew how explicit the result would be.

"I told them it was a love story of sorts!" says director Michael Winterbottom, who was responsible for *24 Hour Party People*, the story of the U.K.'s Factory Records. "I haven't misled anyone. I describe it as a concert movie. People assume it's porn if it's got sex in it. But why should sex only be shown in a pornographic context?" *CLARK COLLIS*

Clockwise from top left: flynetpictures.com; courtesy of Revolution Films (2); Frank Mullen/Wireimage.com; Gary French

SEE SNOOP AT THE
Projekt Revolution
TOUR
ACCESS TO THE SHOW SWEEPSTAKES
GRAND PRIZE-
WIN A DAY WITH
Snoop Dogg
1st prize (1) attend all '04 World Series® games
2nd prize (1) flat screen tv, dvd dream system, computer & mp3 player
3rd prize (25) MLB™ memorabilia signed by the bands
4th prize (100) $50 Finish Line gift cards
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AND FINISH LINE
THE ONLY PLACE TO GET EXCLUSIVE ARGYLE JERSEYS
ENTER AT ANY ONE OF OUR 550+ FINISH LINE STORES
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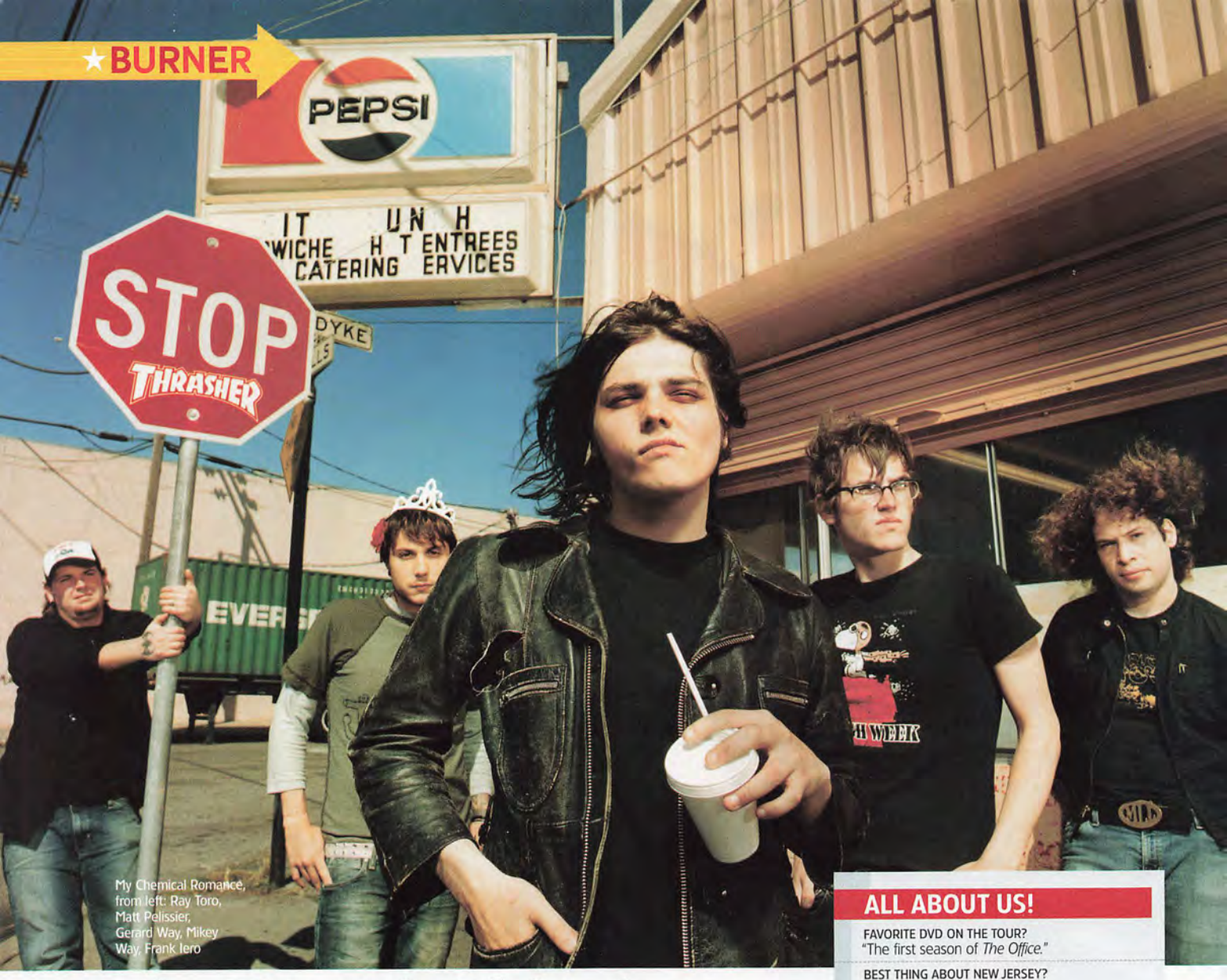

My Chemical Romance, from left: Ray Toro, Matt Pelissier, Gerard Way, Mikey Way, Frank Iero

The Next Big Thing!

MY CHEMICAL ROMANCE

Five emo fast-rockers from New Jersey insist they are *not* OK. OK?

BY NICK DUERDEN
PHOTOGRAPHY BY SEAN MURPHY

IT TAKES FRONTMAN Gerard Way less than two minutes to mention his therapist.

We're talking about My Chemical Romance's new album, *Three Cheers for Sweet Revenge*, and the fact that, within four days of its completion, the band (Way, his brother Mikey, Ray Toro, Matt Pelissier and Frank Iero) went on tour because Way is terrified of staying at home.

"It's important to keep up momentum," he says, as the tour bus approaches Seattle. "When I'm home I get stagnant, I go crazy and have to see my therapist. Being on the road keeps me busy." Having traveled the breadth of the country these past six weeks, he looks exhausted but happy. "I'm OK when I'm busy."

Way formed MCR three years ago in his native New Jersey after his previous job as an animation artist was proving ruinous to his mental health: "The animation business is even more cutthroat and corrupt than the music industry. I felt like I was throwing my life away."

> **It's a hard, fast, impressively ravaged rock album.**

The quintet's debut, *I Brought You My Bullets, You Brought Me Your Love* came out in 2002, but it is this month's successor that promises to elevate them into genuine Next Big Things. *Three Cheers* is equal parts Nine Inch Nails and the Misfits, a hard, fast, impressively ravaged rock album that, says Way, earned its Parental Guidance sticker not for bad language ("there's only one *f*-word on the whole fucking thing") but for "very fucked up, very dark" content.

"Morrissey is a huge influence on me," says the 27-year-old, "and I hope our songs are uplifting like his, even though the lyrics are pretty fucked up. The most telling song, I guess, is 'I'm Not Okay (I Promise)'. There's nothing wrong with me specifically, but I do get depressed a lot. My therapist says I have a fear of success, but that's the beauty of this band. This is the first thing I've done that I haven't tried to sabotage. It has helped me overcome so many problems."

He flashes his tired grin once more.

"I will overcome my fear of success," he insists. "All this self-doubt bullshit is a thing of the past, trust me." [BLENDER]

ALL ABOUT US!

FAVORITE DVD ON THE TOUR?
"The first season of *The Office*."

BEST THING ABOUT NEW JERSEY?
"The malls and diner coffee."

FAVORITE SONG RIGHT NOW BY ANY ARTIST?
"Stockholm Syndrome," by Muse

LYRIC MOST PROUD OF HAVING WRITTEN?
"Oh how wrong we were to think that immortality meant never dying." ("Our Lady of Sorrows")

EXACTLY HOW EMO IS MCR?
"So emo we shit nautical stars."

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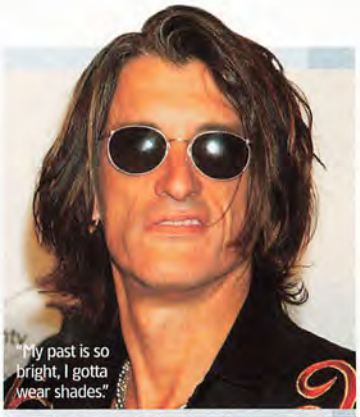
"My past is so bright, I gotta wear shades."

Do You Rock?

Joe Perry

Does the man who wrote the classic "Walk This Way"... rock?

Ever trashed a hotel room?
I threw an easy chair out of a window into the water. The next day, the manager, while driving to work, saw the chair floating near the dock and said, "Yup, Aerosmith's in town."

Largest number of people you've woken up next to in a hotel bed?
Anywhere from four to 10.

Best rumor about yourself?
Stevie Nicks was carrying my baby.

Biggest celeb's home that you've ever gotten drunk in?
Rick Nielsen, of Cheap Trick. He has a bathroom with a standup urinal. It's perfect for beer drinkers. I liked it so much I put one in my studio.

Worst rock & roll injury?
I fell out of bed once and broke my ribs. I don't remember it happening.

Worst tour horror story?
While flying to Syracuse, New York, the pressure started to leak out of the plane, which was aiming straight down. All the lights were out for two full minutes.

Ever wrecked a car?
I was driving a Corvette, hit a patch of sand and fishtailed into the guardrail. The only thing left in one piece was the seat.

Ever get lucky on an airplane?
I wouldn't call it luck. *DAVID HILL*

VERDICT

HIS OWN URINAL? EASY CHAIR–TOSSING? JOE PERRY ROCKS HARD!

→ AEROSMITH'S NEW CD, *HONKIN' ON BOBO (COLUMBIA)*, IS OUT NOW.

WHERE'S COURTNEY?

Love recently became a mail-order minister and married 20 couples in a Nevada casino.

NEWS ROUNDUP!

THE DARKNESS have enlisted legendary '80s rock producer **"MUTT" LANGE** to work on their second album. The husband of Shania Twain has masterminded hit albums for Foreigner, Def Leppard and AC/DC.

SHARON OSBOURNE is rumored to be sharing a panel with **SIMON COWELL** on the forthcoming British pop talent TV show *The X Factor*. "She will be the rudest, most outspoken judge ever," said a TV insider.

DAMON DASH says he will reuse tracks from his unreleased collaboration with **VICTORIA BECKHAM** — after replacing the former Spice Girl's vocals with those of another singer.

Cruising bathrooms for sex was a good way to meet "ordinary people," **GEORGE MICHAEL** has noted. The star also admitted he found his 1998 arrest a stimulating experience. "Guilt is a massive turn-on," he said.

WORD!

"That's our Grammy. We're gonna take it all the way home."

JOE SIMPSON, FATHER OF JESSICA, ON HIS DAUGHTER'S COVER OF THE ROBBIE WILLIAMS HIT "ANGELS"

Booze, heroin, homoerotic tension: possible reasons for Barat and Doherty's brawling

Madness!

Crack addict Pete Doherty quits Libertines, flees to France

★ CONFUSION SURROUNDS the future of the Libertines after crack-addicted singer Pete Doherty told a London newspaper he was quitting the band and fleeing to France.

"I'm heading to Paris to escape with my girlfriend, Irene. She's the one person who understands me. She will help me give up the crack pipe," he said before leaving. "I want to clean up, but it's something I have to do on my own terms."

Doherty had been missing for a week after being asked to leave the Priory, a rehab clinic where he had been under a suicide watch. The singer had broken the clinic's rules by attending a soccer match.

While in the hospital, he posted rambling messages on his Web site, babyshambles.com. "I'm fine," he wrote. "Vomit and shrieks, some girl warbling down the corridor in a towel. At least my laptop is here still. The only one who ever stood by me."

"Vomit and shrieks, some girl warbling down the corridor."

Before being admitted, Doherty urged fans to rip drapes from the ceiling at a gig, provoking a near-riot.

Meanwhile, the band's producer, former Clash guitarist Mick Jones, has called their forthcoming album "sensational," adding, "A record as good as this only comes along once in a generation." *STEVE LOWE*

Clockwise from top left: Tammie Arroyo/AFF/Retna Ltd.; Andy Willsher/NME/IPC Syndication; Gary French (illustration); Dennis Van Tine/LFI

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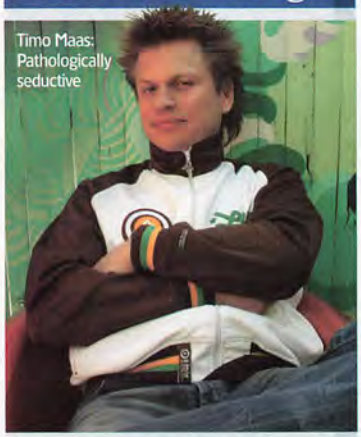
Timo Maas: Pathologically seductive

TIMO MAAS

At Halcyon, 227 Smith Street, Brooklyn, New York

FRANKIE GOES TO HOLLYWOOD "MAXIMUM JOY"
"When I heard 'Relax' for the first time, I freaked out. It was like opening Pandora's box. It's ass-kicking music, and it's still so different."

GREEN VELVET "FLASH"
"This track is more than 10 years old, and it's a milestone in techno house music. I love Green Velvet; they're just from another world."

BRETT JOHNSON "GET UP READY TO HIT"
"It's really slow, but when you play it at the right moment, it blows the roof off. It's crazy but very emotional. It's ladies' house music."

JOSH WINK "FILL ME WITH ACID/OAKISH"
"Old-school acid music with crazy breakdowns — an important record! It transforms a normal night into a crazy night."
LAUREN HARRIS

→ TIMO MAAS'S NEW ALBUM, *MUSIC FOR THE MAASES 2* (KINETIC), IS OUT NOW.

NEWS ROUNDUP!

METHOD MAN has one room in his house in which he indulges his marijuana habit, in order to keep his children from being exposed to drugs. "The kids know not to come in when I'm smoking," he says.

Louisiana State Representative Derrick Shepherd is trying to ban low-rider jeans, a style made popular by the state's most famous pop star, **BRITNEY SPEARS**. Offenders could be fined up to $500. "The community's outraged, and if parents can't do their job — if they can't regulate what their children wear — then there should be a law," Shepherd said.

After the two met at a London charity performance, **JAY-Z** described **PRINCE CHARLES** as "cool, very cool." The heir to the British throne admitted, "I'm not very familiar with the urban scene, but I do like some of the music."

WORD!

"I only have one way out. I need to marry Ben Affleck."
COURTNEY LOVE

The Darkness's Justin Hawkins (circled) with Dad, Mom and younger brother Dan, circa 2000

Justin, minus dreadlocks, plus catsuit

Cheers!

The Darkness brothers inspired by hard-partying mom!

★ DARKNESS BROTHERS Justin and Dan Hawkins caught the music bug early — from their rocking mom, Sandy. According to frontman Justin, Mrs. Hawkins, 60, was a '60s scenester who partied with such legends as Jimi Hendrix and Brian Jones.

One tale had a powerful effect on her son's future wardrobe choices. "She used to tell me about [Brian Jones] turning up in a disco in a pink catsuit and unzipping it dangerously low as he danced with girls," said Justin, who owns a collection of low-cut catsuits. "So this seductive image was something I've always identified with."

On another memorable night, she shared a bottle of Scotch with Hendrix — though this story never impressed her son. "Hendrix was a Strat man," he sniffed. "And I'm a Gibson Les Paul man." *STEVE LOWE*

Weird Band Alert!

BERET!

Four angry Americans turn themselves into Frenchmen

"We are so much boring ourselves!"

WHAT'S *LE DEAL?*
Four New York men, disillusioned with American society, transformed themselves into the Frenchmen of Beret! by adopting mustaches, homoerotically charged striped shirts and a love for wine, cheese and cigarettes.

WHAT MAKES THEM SO ANGRY?
"An obvious example is Good Charlotte," says singer James Brown (also known as Jacques Merde), 24.

DO THEY PLAY SONGS IN FRENCH?
Their recent release *Fromage de la Rue* contains screamo renditions of "Alouette" and "Frère Jacques." Other songs are "Foie Gras" (with the line "Fuck you, skinny American") and "Poumon Noir" ("Black Lung"). "That's really a love song to cigarettes," says bassist James Lynch (a.k.a. Albert Fausse-Couche), 22.

HOW DO PRO-AMERICAN AUDIENCES REACT?
Teaching Americans the joys of being French seems to be unpopular. One ex-Marine in Utah pulled a gun on them before being talked down. "We've beaten many people with baguettes," Brown says. *JON REGARDIE*

Tim Soter (Maas), REX USA (Hawkins family), Simon Songhurst/Camera Press/Retna Ltd. (Justin), courtesy of Beret!, Gary French (illustration)

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Useful Tips From the Stars!

HOW TO...

Confuse Telemarketers!

California pop-punkers **Yellowcard**, former phone salesmen for breast-enlargement pills, help you get on any company's "do not call" list

BY STEVE KANDELL
PHOTOGRAPHY BY JUSTIN STEPHENS

Yellowcard, from left: Sean Mackin, Alex Lewis, Ryan Key, Ben Harper, Longineu Parsons

1 BE LOUD!

SINGER-GUITARIST RYAN KEY: "If you want to get off the phone with a telemarketer right away, turn up your TV or scratch the receiver with your fingernails as soon as you hear 'May I please speak to Mr. or Mrs. ...' That's a sure-fire sign. Make it sound like total chaos. They'll think they called a construction site."

2 BE INQUISITIVE!

GUITARIST BEN HARPER: "Become enamored of the telemarketer. Fall in love with their job and just ask tons of questions until they can't take it anymore: 'How did you get started doing this? How much do you get paid? Who's the coolest person you've ever called?' People asked us this stuff all the time."

3 BE ANNOYING!

DRUMMER LONGINEU PARSONS: "Repeat every single word they say right after them — it drives telemarketers nuts, but they're not allowed to hang up on you. The calls are always being recorded, and they have to try to make the sale no matter what. This trick completely weirds them out — they won't know how to handle it!"

4 BE CREEPY!

BASSIST ALEX LEWIS: "Weird-sounding guys would ask us if the breast-enlargement pills worked for them. That would always make us feel uncomfortable, because we had to lie and say that they did. It's a good device to ask twisted, awkward questions, since the telemarketers aren't allowed to hang up on the public."

→ **YELLOWCARD'S NEW ALBUM, *OCEAN AVENUE* (CAPITOL), IS OUT NOW.**

Prop styling: John Millhauser

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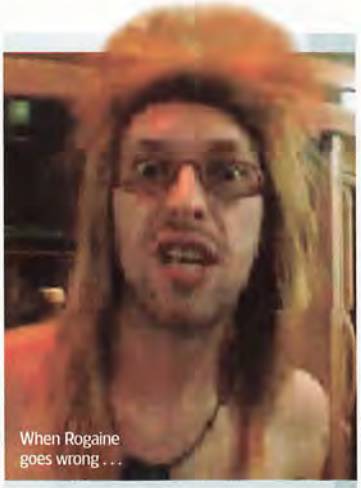
When Rogaine goes wrong . . .

WACKY!

Chris Martin raps for baby-mama Gwyneth and baby Apple

COLDPLAY HAVE RELEASED a spoof rap song in tribute to frontman Chris Martin and Gwyneth Paltrow's new daughter, Apple.

The track, which the band recorded under the pseudonym Nappies, finds a bare-chested Martin rapping to his superstar wife, "There's shit going down that you can't disguise/ When your boobs done got 10 times the size."

Coldplay, on group baby-sitting duty

The Nappies perform the song in a homemade video wearing ludicrous wigs. The video can be viewed at coldplay.com.

The song is doubly appropriate given that Coldplay-hating British label chief Alan McGee once described the band as producing "music for bed-wetters." *CLARK COLLIS*

NEWS ROUNDUP!

Nineteen-year-old Julia Volkova of Russian "lesbian" band T.A.T.U. is pregnant by her longtime boyfriend. She will, however, continue working closely with her singing partner, Lena Katina.

When he was spotted outdoors running topless near his Hollywood home recently, JUSTIN TIMBERLAKE's torso was looking pale as "a bottle of milk," an onlooker said.

Responding to rumors that his band was dropped by Interscope Records, limpbizkit singer FRED DURST posted a note on his Web site: "Limpbizkit is not breaking up for any reason. It's weird to hear silly shit like that."

During one of her frequent trans-atlantic journeys, JOSS STONE recently claimed to have lost a suitcase full of underwear and socks. "But it's OK, because they are clean," she said.

JACK BLACK IS THE NEW MICHAEL MOORE

WORD!

"She's a real hero for so many people."

BRITNEY SPEARS, ON ELLEN DeGENERES

Life After Rock

One of these men is not wearing a jacket.

Peter Quaife

[OF THE KINKS]

THEN!
BASSIST, 1960–1971

★ "IN THE BEGINNING, being in the Kinks was fun — it was every boy's dream. As a musician I enjoyed it, but after a while, being out on the road started to feel more like a day job.

"One highlight was the morning I realized 'You Really Got Me' hit number 1. That took me a little while to get used to. I thought, 'It shouldn't be happening to us — we live in [the leafy suburb of] Muswell Hill, for God's sake!'

"Ray [Davies] felt a lot of pressure, having to do all the writing. When he and [guitarist] Dave [Davies] lost their tempers, you had to get out of the room . . . quick! Anything could set them off. One time, [drummer] Mick [Avory] said he preferred one type of milk. Ray disagreed. Mick said, 'Well, I do.' And a huge fight ensued — over milk!

"I left because of the fighting. Eventually, it came down to what Ray wanted, so I thought I'd better go do something else.

"When Ray Davies lost his temper, you had to leave the room quick!"

NOW!
ARTIST AND WRITER, COPENHAGEN, DENMARK

"I've done art all my life, and it was easy to pick up after I left the band. Finally, my thoughts, my ideas, my imagination! I didn't have to ask anybody for permission. My painting is all over the place — oil, airbrush, watercolors. Imagemakers gallery in Pennsylvania has most of my work.

"I'm a dialysis patient, and since I'm at the clinic a lot, I started drawing cartoons about dialysis that evolved into an upcoming book, *The Lighter Side of Dialysis*.

"These days I get up, have my coffee, watch the news and then just get on with it. I sit with a pencil and paper and see what happens. I have a very creative mind!" *AS TOLD TO JON REGARDIE*

David Redfern/Redferns/Retna Ltd. (the Kinks); Gary French (illustration); MWPress/Zuma (Black, Moore); courtesy of coldplay.com (Martin); Xposure Photo Agency (Coldplay)

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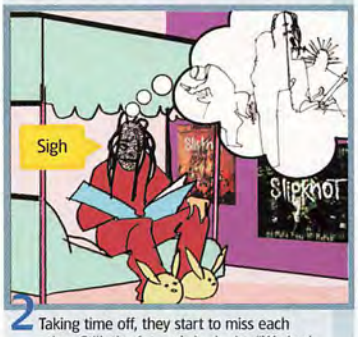
HUG ME!

Instead of breaking up, the nine masked members of Slipknot have turned to group counseling. Awww. . .

1 After touring behind 2001's *Iowa,* Slipknot consider breaking up. "We're nine fucking serious individuals with some serious shit to work out," says singer Corey Taylor.



2 Taking time off, they start to miss each other. Still, the future is in doubt. "We had to make sure we all wanted to be back in the same room together," Taylor says.

3 The band work on two months of self-help therapy to exorcise demons. "Besides exploring music, we're exploring our relationships with each other," Taylor says.

4 "We got rid of the dark, stressful elements around us," Taylor says. The band decide to stay together. Phew! *STEVE KANDELL*

OBITS

TIMI YURO
62, March 30, in Las Vegas, of cancer. Early-'60s vocalist whose hits showed a more soulful approach than other female singers of the era. Her greatest chart success was the 1961 ballad "Hurt."

PAUL ATKINSON
58, April 1, in Santa Monica, California, of liver and kidney disease. Guitarist with British '60s pop-rock band the Zombies. Atkinson later made the career switch to A&R and signed ABBA, Judas Priest, Bruce Hornsby and Mr. Mister.

NIKI SULLIVAN
66, April 6, in Sugar Creek, Missouri. Played alongside Buddy Holly in the Crickets. Sullivan, who died in his sleep, played rhythm guitar and sang backup on Holly classics like "That'll Be the Day" and "Maybe Baby."

RAY CONDO
53, April 15, in Vancouver, British Columbia, of an apparent heart attack. Canadian rockabilly revivalist who built a cult audience across North America in the '90s leading the hard-rocking, hard-touring Ray Condo and His Ricochets.

HUBERT SELBY JR.
75, April 26, in Los Angeles, of chronic pulmonary disease. Author of the 1964 novel *Last Exit to Brooklyn* who recorded the spoken-word albums *Live in Europe 1989* (produced by Henry Rollins) and *Blue Eyes and Exit Wounds* (with rock critic Nick Tosches).

Wacky Hawaiian shirt–wearing drummer not pictured

In the Studio

"Sex and Fear"

That's what Interpol's new album is about. Spooky!

★ "CONNECTICUT IS A police state!" declares Carlos D., bassist for '80s-punk revivalists Interpol. "After 9 P.M. it's illegal to sell alcohol — 8:30 rolls around and we freak out. It doesn't matter what we're doing, we get in the car and go to the liquor store."

For the past few months, Carlos D. and the notoriously hard-partying foursome (rounded out by singer Paul Banks, guitarist Daniel Kessler and drummer Sam Fogarino) have shacked up in a former insane asylum-cum-studio, contending with blue laws while they complete the follow-up to their indie smash debut, 2002's *Turn On the Bright Lights.* "It's like being stranded in a desert," Carlos explains. "We've got to make our own party, which usually means watching Comedy Central at 3 A.M."

"Especially if *Chappelle's Show* is on!" Banks adds. Despite dismal nightlife, their new album will surprise fans expecting the band's signature Joy Division–inspired gloom.

"It's poppier and more dance floor–oriented in some places," Carlos says. "I imagine people boogieing, getting their freak on. One part sounds like Iron Maiden. But there's some dark gems, too."

It's those overcast moments that seem to suit Banks the best.

"Lyrically and thematically, it's the same," he says. "Songs about sex and fear." So the band's breakaway success hasn't led to a life of champagne and expensive suits? "Not really," Banks says. "The last thing I bought was a $4 wool blazer at a Salvation Army." *JONAH WEINER*

ALL ABOUT OUR ALBUM!

ARTIST
Interpol

STUDIO
Tarquin Studios, Bridgeport, Connecticut

PRODUCED BY
Interpol, Peter Katis

LAST RECORD
Turn On the Bright Lights (Matador, 2002)

NEW RECORD
As yet untitled (due in September 2004)

ALSO IN THE STUDIO

<< KINGS OF LEON are in producer Ethan Johns's L.A. studio, recording the follow-up to 2002's *Youth and Young Manhood,* out fall 2004 . . . .

Rapper **BEANIE SIGEL** is in NYC's Sony Studio finishing *The B-Coming,* his follow-up to 2001's *The Reason,* due in late August 2004 . . . .

Electronic duo **DEEP DISH** are recording their first artist record in six years at their Washington, D.C. studios. Title, release date undetermined . . . .

Brooklyn's **PANTHERS** are in upstate New York's Clubhouse Studios working on their Vice Records debut, due out this September . . . .

Courtesy of Interpol (Interpol), John Jay (illustration); Rex USA (Taylor)

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GARNIER

20 Songs You Must Download This Month

AS SELECTED BY BLENDER

Hogwarts reject Ben Kweller

The Cure's Day-Glo clothes are at the laundromat. Again!

Maria Mena: "... and I sing out of this!"

1 **My Chemical Romance "I'm Not Okay (I Promise)"** *REPRISE*
A bizarre love triangle sends these New Jersey punk-metal rookies into one anthemic freak-out.

2 **Jadakiss feat. Nate Dogg "Time's Up"** *RUFF RYDERS/INTERSCOPE*
Well-oiled menace from the chubby gangsta — but Dogg's owl hoot nearly steals the show.

3 **T.O.K. "Gal You a Lead"** *VP*
A dancehall version of 'N Sync — had they grown up in Kingston rather than Orlando.

4 **Ben Kweller "The Rules"** *ATO/RCA*
This slacker loses God and looks for purpose in his girlfriend instead, over driving blues-rock.

5 **Lloyd Banks "On Fire"** *G-UNIT/INTERSCOPE*
50 Cent's gruff homie toasts one-night stands and disses gold diggers on this squawking club hit.

6 **The Roots "Don't Say Nuthin' "** *GEFFEN*
Sleek, hi-tech electro from hip-hop's finest band; its monotone gibberish hook would make Missy proud.

7 **Kanye West "Get 'Em High" (Ratatat Remix)** *NO LABEL*
Two Brooklyn hipsters remix Kanye's playful pickup lines into a spare, popping groove.

8 **Joe Budden "Wait a Minute"** *DEF JAM*
Budden jacks the drum breaks of Dizzee Rascal's "Fix Up, Look Sharp" for this thundering party-starter.

9 **The Cure "Lost"** *I AM/GEFFEN*
A beautiful, detuned mess capturing Robert Smith in a moment of shivering anguish.

10 **The Get Up Kids "Martyr Me"** *VAGRANT*
"All I have's defeat," Matt Pryor groans, but don't let that mislead you — this is emo despair at its sunniest.

11 **Team 9 "Me Against the Monkey"**
Imagine Britney frenching Madonna — and the Pixies' Frank Black! Britney's inner art-rocker revealed.

12 **Conway "Nutcracker"** *UNIVERSAL*
This rap upstart turns the classic ballet theme into a slinky club jam. Leotards are the new Kevlar vests!

13 **Cam'ron "Lord You Know"** *ROC-A-FELLA/DEF JAM*
The Harlem tough tries for a wistful hood jam and succeeds — without a single apology to his mama.

14 **The Shins "Kissing the Lipless"** *SUB POP*
Albuquerque foursome serves up sweet, falsetto indie-pop, filled with lyrics about beds growing grass.

15 **Gretchen Wilson "Redneck Woman"** *EPIC*
No fancy duds, no fine schoolin': Country's new star writes an empowerment anthem, trailer trash–style!

16 **Maria Mena "You're the Only One"** *COLUMBIA*
Like Alanis Morissette — only with a Delia's wardrobe, a boy she actually likes and an affinity for giggling.

17 **Nina Sky "Move Ya Body"** *UNIVERSAL*
Two NYC twins match silky R&B moans to a dancehall-disco riddim.

18 **Elf Power "Walking With the Beggar Boys"** *ORANGE TWIN*
A scrappy power-pop gem about panhandlers and immortality from these Athens, Georgia, indie-rockers.

19 **The Pongs "I Love You 'Cause (You Look Like Me)"** *IN THE RED*
For added enjoyment of this sneer at the hot and incestuous, imagine Mary Kate singing it to Ashley.

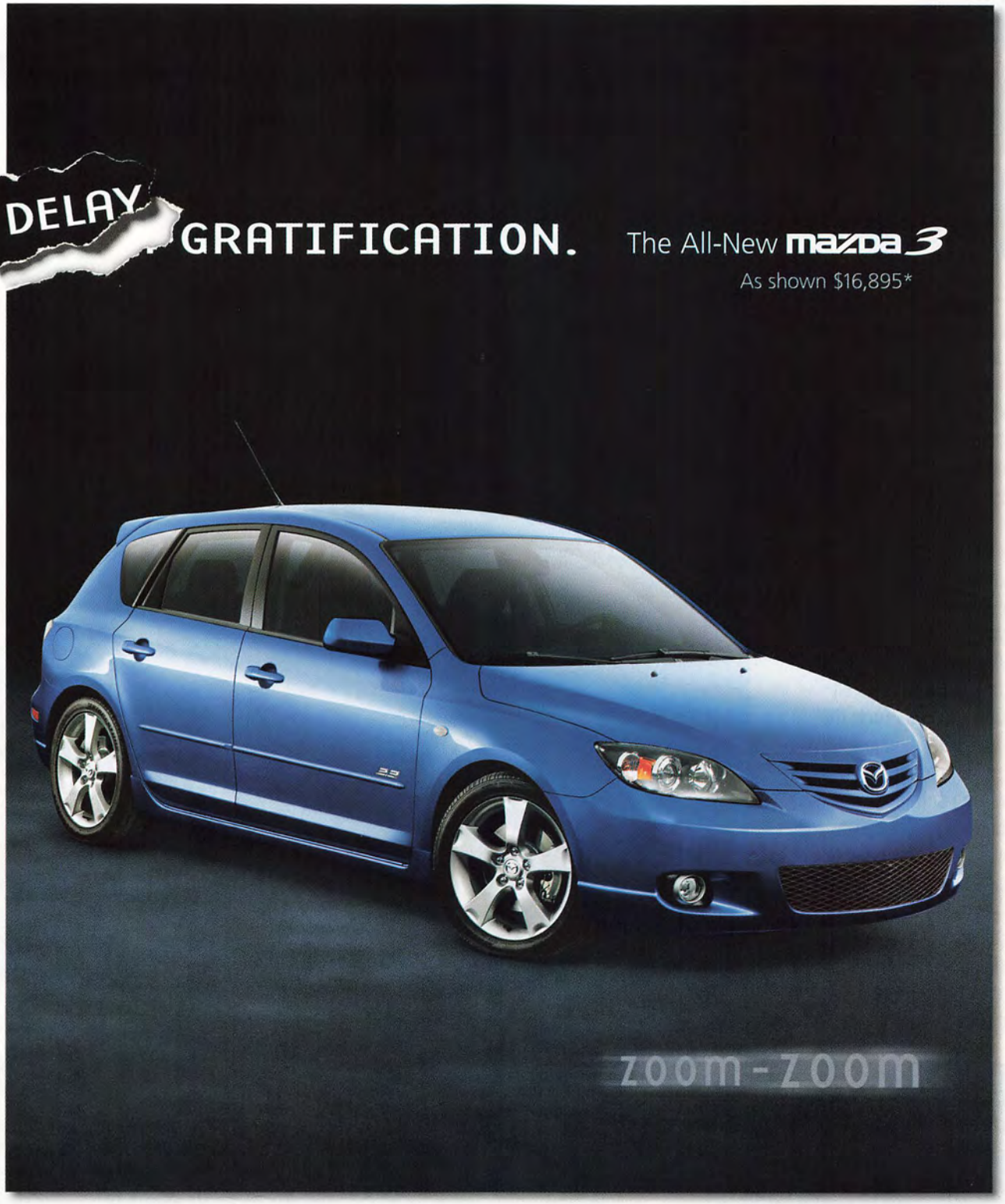
20 **Wiley "Pies"** *XL*
Across submarine-sonar electro bloops, this hyped Brit MC turns a soccer chant into a gluttonous hook.

ICON KEY

SADDOES · HIPSTERS · CRUNKY · RAWK · AGING HIPSTERS · SUPERSTAR POP

Note: Not all of these songs are legally available for download — yet. In those instances, *Blender* encourages you to purchase the original CD. From top: Michael Waring, courtesy of Geffen; courtesy of Columbia Records

GO TO NAPSTER.COM TO DOWNLOAD THESE AND OTHER SONGS



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KICK UP YOUR BOOTS

Like the state itself, everything in Texas comes in king-size portions: BBQ platters, 10-gallon cowboy hats, even the music festivals – like this fall's Austin City Limits and next year's South by Southwest. This year alone, the "Live Music Capital of the World" will host thousands of music lovers and hundreds of diverse acts. From alt-country to indie-rock, the lineups will be huge!

After a long day outdoors checking out the sights and sounds of Austin, music fans in the know head to Austin's famous 6th Street, chock full of the city's most famous landmark bars and concert venues, to rock out to even more buzzworthy talent.

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This September, Austin will welcome an estimated 80,000 music fans back for the Third Annual Austin City Limits. More than 130 eclectic acts will take part in the proceedings held on eight separate stages in Zilker Park.

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Every March for the past 18 years, the music world has converged on Austin for South by Southwest (SXSW). Over the course of five days, music professionals and fans participate in panels, a trade show, movie screenings, sporting events and an exhaustive nighttime music festival. With more than 1,200 bands on 60 stages, the only disappointment at SXSW is that it's impossible to see every group!

GET LOST

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Splash of pineapple juice
Maraschino cherry

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Dear Superstar

YOU SEND QUESTIONS, WE GET ANSWERS. WHO LOVES YA, BABY?

Robert Smith

No, he won't sing at your funeral (or with Elton John), but the Cure frontman will answer your queries about booze-fueled bets, his favorite drug and how he earned the nickname "Fat Bob."

BY DAVID KEEPS
PHOTOGRAPHY BY CHRIS BUCK

WHAT'S BLACK AND red and white all over? Robert Smith's face, of course. With ebony eye makeup and crimson MAC lipstick smeared across his ghost-of-an-English manor complexion, the curator of the Cure is slumped in a chair at the Sunset Marquis in Los Angeles treating *Blender* to a preview of *The Cure*, the band's first CD in four years.

"The idea was never to become a famous person," he says. "Whether we get into the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame is not really keeping me awake at night."

Though he claims that for years his band was "airbrushed out of history," the rise of groups like the Rapture, the Darkness and his favorites Mogwai find the Cure getting props from a generation that has never known a world without "The Lovecats." Longtime fans Blink-182 even asked him to sing on their last album.

When the last guitar chord rings out, the singer invites *Blender* to an adjoining room, where he prepares to answer your questions armed only with his droll wit — and a bottle of Corona. "All the nutrients I need," he explains.

Robert Smith: "Take *that*, ozone layer!"

You used to have a crippling fear of airplanes. How did you get over it?

JEFFK, BRONX, NEW YORK

I didn't, actually. Around the time of [1989's] *Disintegration*, we were so in demand that I figured if I said I was scared of flying, we could cut down the number of things that I did. Saying we had to sail everywhere or take trains, I could have days off traveling. So for about three years, 1989 to 1992, I kept the pretense that I had this phobia about flying. We did two American tours sailing over on the *QE2*, which was very civilized. The first time we did it, I arrived in America shattered — it was five days in a boat with, like, 47 bars and a casino. It was like a tour before a tour.

What kind of place is your hometown of Crawley, England?

LOVECATZ1348, BUTLER, PENNSYLVANIA

A soulless place. Most punk bands came from suburbia, not London, in those days. When you're living that close to the city but not close enough, it will actually drive you to do something.

What Smith family tradition do you proudly uphold?

DVANN08, BUXTON, NORTH DAKOTA

Partly because it's a Catholic family — even though I don't retain any notion of it at all — the sense of Sunday being a special day, and the tradition of having the family around, has always remained with me. Actually, it's always been quite a dismal day. There was certain music on the radio, the same dinner, a huge argument between my brother, who was intensely communist, and my dad, who had just been bumped up into the hierarchy of an evil empire that was charging starving people far too much for drugs. I have fought long and hard over the years to try and make Sunday like any other day, but it's an unwinnable battle.

You've known your wife, Mary, for 30 years. Did you ever want to bring little Bob Smiths into the world?

SEXYSANTOS, ABERDEEN, MARYLAND

We decided at a very young age that we wouldn't have children. My natural urge to be a father is actually not that great, but I do have 25 nephews and nieces, and I really revel in being an uncle. I can take them out or have them over for the weekend and be able to send them back. Being a child myself, I kind of know what the two of us have missed, but I think it is more than compensated for by being able to still be the same to her as when we first met. We have absolutely nothing to stop us from saying, "Let's go away for three months," and just walking out the door. →

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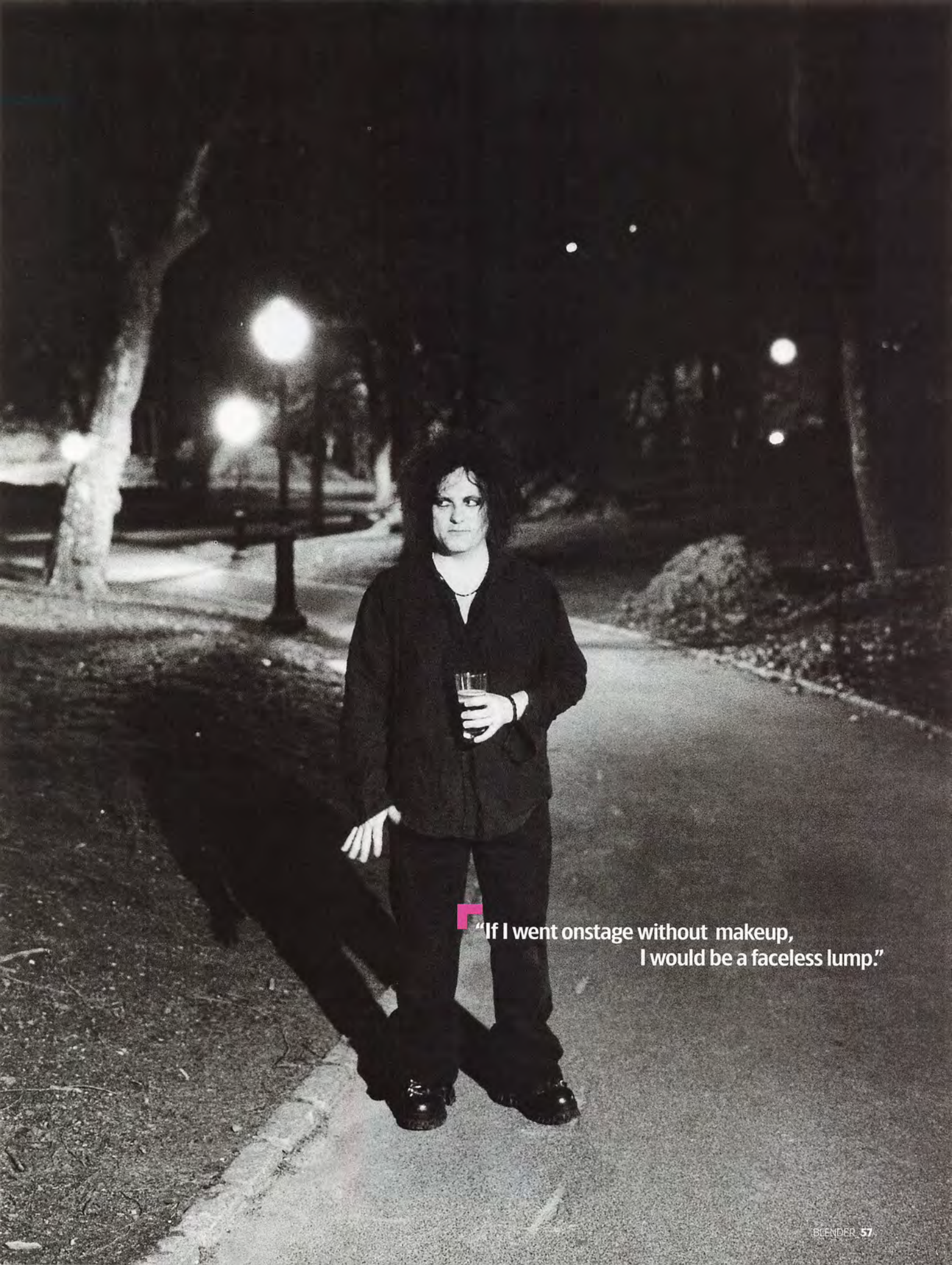

"If I went onstage without makeup,
I would be a faceless lump."

Smith and Scissorhands: "Copycat!" "Bitch!"

The Cure in 1981

Are you a good boss?

MORESI792, JASPER, INDIANA

I'm the world's best boss. I should get an award. I employ unemployable people and don't expect anyone to do anything that I wouldn't do myself. I interface with the real world. There are few people I've met that know more about what we do than I do, and you'd have to be pretty stupid not to grasp the basics: Essentially, the record company is trying to screw the artist. So I manage the band, and it's not that hard. I deal with about 15 e-mails in 15 minutes, and they're all yes or no answers. I suppose, from an early age, the sense of making my own mistakes was always very important to me.

What's the stupidest mistake you've made while in the grip of demon alcohol?

BUFFALOBILL288, ABBOTT SPRINGS, ARIZONA

How long have you got? The one that always springs to mind was when I bet someone that I could go around the outside of a hotel jumping from balcony to balcony. It took about an hour, and once I got to a certain point it seemed farther to go back to where I could hear Mary screaming. I felt so exhausted that once I was on the other side of the building, I'd be sitting on someone's balcony gasping. That was particularly stupid because the bet was lamentable, like one of those Beavis and Butt-head "I bet you can't do that" things.

All things considered, do you have any regrets about having written a song called "Killing an Arab"?

BAMBOOOOOGAL, DOWNEY, CALIFORNIA

I don't regret the song at all, but I think the title has drawn so much unnecessary attention. It's gotten to the point where I've had it written into an agreement that the record company can't use the song without my approval. Used in the wrong context, it has at times overshadowed everything we've ever done. And it's not that good a song. If it was the best thing I'd ever written, I would probably get less upset about it.

Describe the first time you ever wore makeup.

FFLOBERG, QUINCY, MASSACHUSETTS

I was 12, and I was going to a school that was this educational experiment, which didn't last long. You were expected to express yourself, so I wore a dress and

With wife Mary on their wedding day, 1988

makeup, and I got beaten up on the way home — which wasn't really a very fair reward, but I suppose it hardened my resolve, because obviously I continued wearing makeup. I thought, "Why is makeup so offensive?" During the punk era, it was just a thing you did, part of going out. I've never been shy, but I don't think I would really be the same person if I weren't aware that I was wearing makeup. I feel that if I went onstage without makeup, I would just be a faceless lump.

How many black sweaters do you own, anyway?

SMCMURRIAN81, CHEYENNE, WYOMING

I own three. All made by my mum. One mohair and two woolen. But I haven't worn them for years and years and years. I would say six days out of seven I wear black. Obviously on Sunday I wear a hair shirt.

"I tend to go on drinking binges for no good reason."

Some, er, red hot chili peppers

Is that really you on Friendster.com?

LAGAMVITA, RANCHO PALOS VERDES, CALIFORNIA

No, but strangely enough, when I was introduced to Kelly Osbourne, that was her first question: Is that really you on Friendster.com? I've always said that if I go on anything like that I'd put it on our Web site, so people would know.

What is must-see TV for Robert Smith?

FRIEDAPPLE, EUNICE, LOUISIANA

NYPD Blue. I didn't really get into when David Caruso was on it. Sipowicz is the character who drives the show, but everyone else is fantastic. The episode where Jimmy Smits died was one of the best television moments I've ever seen. With so many channels, the idea of television being something really important doesn't happen anymore; everyone is watching something with "style."

Which *South Park* character do you most closely identify with?

HELLOKITTEEE807, SEATTLE

Mr. Garrison!

What earned you the nickname "Fat Bob": booze or snacking?

LEE_419, VIENNA, VIRGINIA

Unfortunately, my propensity to drink is the reason I have fluctuated in weight. I tend to go on extended binges for no real good reason. It's a gene that I've got. I'm addicted!

When you saw *Edward Scissorhands*, did you say, "Oi, there's my hair"?

PHOSHO, HUNTINGTON, NEW YORK

I've never seen it. Well, obviously, I've seen clips, and there was much mirth and merriment in the band over it — but I mean, Tim Burton had a hairstyle that's not a million miles away from that.

What's the biggest lie you ever told in an interview?

SANTASLITLHELPER, TEXARKANA, ARKANSAS

That I'd never seen *Edward Scissorhands*. Ha! I haven't told lies in interviews for a long, long time, actually. I just went through a →

Clockwise from top left: Simon Fowler/LFI; Foto Fantasies; Ebet Roberts; Davies & Starr/Getty Images; Tom Sheehan/TS-LFI

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KATY ROSE AND BAND

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phase when I was doing a lot of interviews, fielding questions that are so inane, you lose the will to live. So I just started to lie as a means of entertainment for myself. And then everything that came out of my mouth was rubbish — my brothers and uncle didn't exist, and I told a Japanese magazine that I had just had twin baby girls.

When your parents tour with you, what songs are they likely to sing along to?

NA213, KELLOGG, MICHIGAN

My mum likes the pop songs. She likes the new single, "The End of the World." And my dad actually likes the ones that are lyrically more intriguing, like "How Beautiful You Are."

In 1992: "Wait, maybe the party *is* tomorrow . . . "

What's the most extravagant rock-star thing you've ever purchased?

MCKINTOLL, KANSAS CITY, MISSOURI

South Park: "Can you draw me thinner?"

In New Orleans I bought a Red Indian invisible shirt with herb pouches all over it. Customs held it for seven months and were saying, "We have to cut open these pouches in order to establish what's in them." I said, "They've been sealed for 200 years!" That's what makes it an invisibility shirt. Although apparently it is not one. I put it on once and played pool wearing it. But guitars are my real weakness. I've got a rather absurd collection of guitars, close to 100, and I can't part with them once I've picked them up.

Describe a perfect evening for Robert Smith.

JUXTAGOTH, TWIN FALLS, IDAHO

It would involve homemade beer, Mary, a telescope, the sea and a bed.

Had you ever heard Blink-182 before they asked you to be on their record?

JENNIEFROMLEBLOCK, TARZANA, CALIFORNIA

I'd heard a couple of singles, but I couldn't really see how I could sing on anything or write any words. But the demos for the album that eventually came out were fantastic. I think they suffer in a way that we suffered in that people weren't allowing them to become something else. If another band put that new CD out as their first album, people would go crazy.

What would you say if Sir Elton John called you up and said that he wanted to record with you?

EAMOSLD, GREENBANK HOLLOW, VERMONT

"I'm very busy that evening watching television."

What's the secret to a great curry?

BRIAN, BALTIMORE

As many chilies as you can fit into the pan.

Smith: "My tanning bed *sucks*!"

I myself am a *phaal* eater — it's the hottest of the hot, past vindaloo and tindaloo.

Would you consider flashing your right boob in front of a live audience in order to gain publicity for your new record?

TOOTZE, SANFORD, FLORIDA

Absolutely . . . not.

What is the first gig you ever attended?

KHEMICAL18, TYLER, TEXAS

I went to the Isle of Wight Festival in 1970. My brother took me, but I wouldn't say I was aware that I was at a concert. I was 11 at the time. Jimi Hendrix played, and I stayed in the tent. I just remember two days of orange tent and dope smoke.

What do people give you for Christmas?

LILSODAS, ALLENVILLE, NEW YORK

My mum has bought me a thing called *The Beano Book* every year since I was born. Children make me stuff, art things, as does Mary. The investment of time has always seemed much more important.

This is the U.K.'s *X-Men*.

"Every year I hire a coach, and we go to Euro Disney."

Are you Scrooge-ish?

YRFASTNFURIOUS, JUNEAU, ALASKA

No! I am lavish. I take everyone away at Christmas. Every year I hire a coach, and we go to Euro Disney and stay at the hotel for a few days. Minnie Mouse coming up to me and asking me for my autograph with all the children looking on in absolute amazement was one of the best and most disturbing moments of my life.

If you had a family crest, what would it look like?

SHOWBANK, WARREN, RHODE ISLAND

I designed one once. I'd been given a book on heraldry in my teens, and I decided to design a family crest. It was a bed and a cloud and something else I can't remember, and it had the Latin for "rest in dignity." I thought it was a really cool motto.

What's your favorite drug of all time?

JMP1973, RENO, NEVADA

I don't take drugs anymore. Probably, if you keep taking drugs, it's just like everything else — either it becomes a necessity or it becomes dull. Alcohol is one drug that stays with me, because it's the one social drug that I'm able to enjoy. My dad brews his own beer, and that's my favorite thing in the world.

What's the worst professional advice you've ever been given?

HELIO78, DENVER

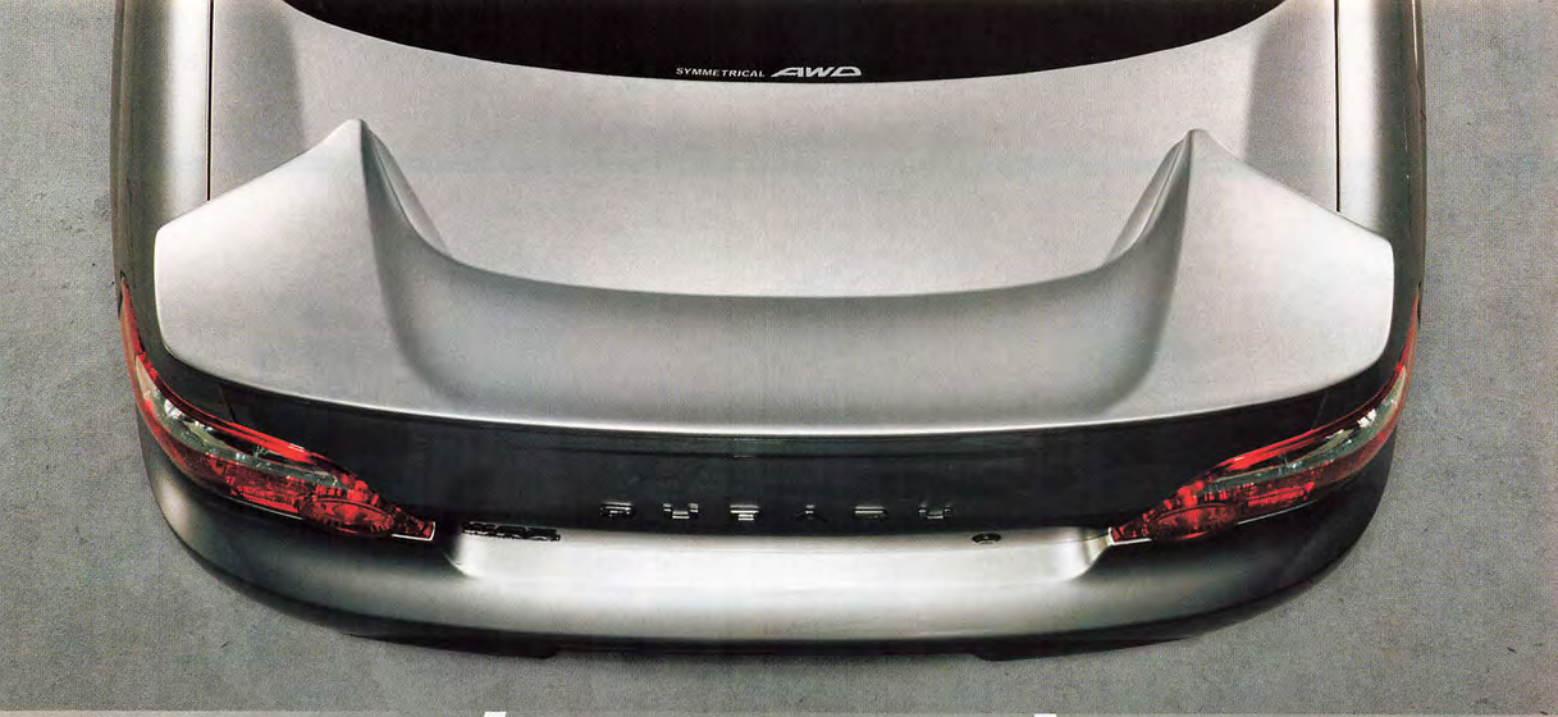
"Just listen to me!"

Would you sing at my funeral?

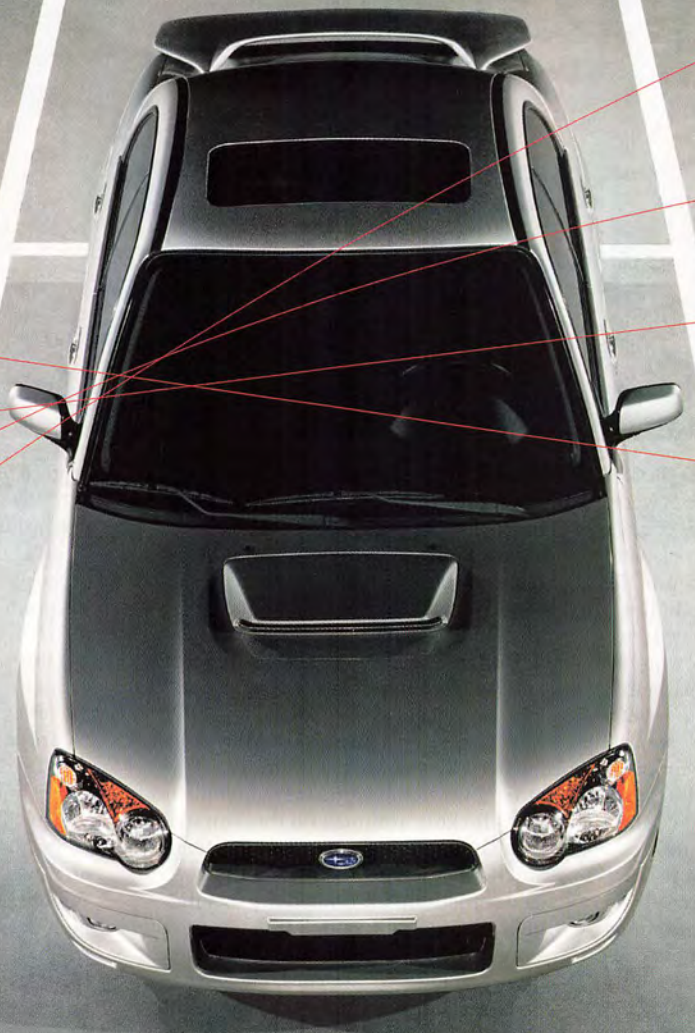
JOETHEFLOATER, REDLANDS, CALIFORNIA

It's unlikely that I will, but I have nothing against the principle. That is not an open invitation to invite me to sing at your funeral. Please. [BLENDER]

Ebet Roberts (Cure); PX/LFI (Smith); courtesy of Comedy Central (South Park)



SUBARU
DRIVEN BY WHAT'S INSIDE.



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BLENDER EXPLORES THE FINEST TUNES IN HISTORY

Guns N' Roses in 1988, from left: Duff McKagan, Izzy Stradlin, Axl Rose, Slash, Steven Adler

Sweet Child o' Mine

Slash thought it was a sappy ballad, and Duff called it "a joke." But the song became a career-making megahit for **Guns N' Roses** — thanks to a little help from Lynyrd Skynyrd and Jack Daniel's

16 YEARS AGO August 1988 THIS MONTH

IN THE MID-'80s, Guns N' Roses were living the life of any number of rock bands operating around the Sunset Strip in Los Angeles. They drank a lot of cheap booze, did a lot of low-grade drugs and supplemented their pathetic incomes by stealing from the purses of whatever girls were prepared to sleep with them. "We love to take care of women," said rhythm guitarist Izzy Stradlin at the time. "But right now we don't have any money, so we treat them like shit."

They might have been rubbing shoulders with future also-rans Faster Pussycat, but Guns N' Roses' venomous punk edge would soon propel them past scene kingpins Mötley Crüe into a stratosphere all their own. They were signed to Geffen Records in March 1986 on the strength of their brutal club shows. Shortly after, singer W. Axl Rose walked into L.A.'s Rainbow Bar and Grill with a photocopy of a check for $37,500, half the band's advance. "We got our deal," he said to a friend he met there. "Buy me a drink. I don't have any money."

Soon enough, Rose would never be short of cash again. Geffen moved the band out of a decaying two-story Hollywood filth pad they had christened "The Hellhouse" and into the more pleasant surroundings of the city's Griffith Park neighborhood to compose material for their debut album, *Appetite for Destruction*.

"There was no furniture," remembers guitarist Slash of his new home. "The other guys would come over, and one time I was fucking around with this stupid little riff. [Guitarist] Izzy [Stradlin] was there, and he was playing chords behind it. Axl said something like, 'Hold the fucking phones! That's amazing!' It turns into this song, 'Sweet Child o' Mine,' and I hated it for years. Even writing and rehearsing to make it a complete song was like pulling teeth. For me, at the time, it was a very sappy ballad."

"Writing the song was like pulling teeth."

" 'Sweet Child o' Mine' was written in five minutes," says GN'R bassist Michael "Duff" McKagan. "It was kind of a joke, because we thought, 'What is this song? It's gonna be nothing — it'll be filler on the record.' "

Rose used a poem he had written about his then-girlfriend, Erin Everly, for the lyrics and some inspiration from his record collection for his vocals.

"I sing in five or six different voices, so not one song is like another, even if they're all hard rock," Rose explained in 1987. "In the last year, I've spent $1,300 on music, everything from Slayer to Wham!, to listen to production, vocals, melodies, this and that. I'm from Indiana, where Lynyrd Skynyrd are considered God to the point that you ended up saying, 'I hate this fucking band!' Yet for 'Sweet Child' I went out and got some old Skynyrd tapes to make sure that we had got that heartfelt feeling."

Mike Clink had been hired to produce the record as much for his no-nonsense approach to potentially unruly bands as his proficiency in the studio. →

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Guns N' Roses never miss an episode of *SpongeBob SquarePants*.

"Clink was critical to the success [of *Appetite for Destruction*]," confirms Alan Niven, who was GN'R's manager at the time. "I cannot imagine another human being having the patience to get the record made."

"How did Mike Clink handle us? With kid gloves," Slash says. "He kept us at arm's length. We were all young and excited to be doing our first record. We partied really hard, but when we were in the studio, we were pretty much together. Just a bottle of Jack Daniel's — no doping and all that stuff."

Limiting themselves to alcohol — in the studio, anyway — the band started work in August 1986 and made solid headway, with Clink trying to limit tracks to a single take.

"I tried to capture the essence of the band, not beat it into the ground," he explains. "It's an instinctive thing. You know when a song is as good as it can be."

"We were really hard workers," McKagan adds. "We rehearsed twice a day! When it was time for us to be 'on,' we took it very seriously."

" 'Sweet Child o' Mine' was easy to record, but because we were not so professional back in the day, it was the one song where we didn't count the song in, because it's a guitar intro," Slash says. "It took me all afternoon to time it out and be at the right place when the drums came in — this was before ProTools and all of that."

Drummer Steven "Popcorn" Adler recalls the band playing the song only once ("I think that's why it did so well," he says. "It was real") — though he was ingesting a lot of heroin at the time.

Whatever the song's genesis, Clink is emphatic when it comes to the effect the finished product had on him: " 'Sweet Child' made the hairs on my arms stand up. It was magical."

The final mix — made by Steve Thompson and Michael Barbiero — went off without a hitch, too. "There seemed to be a synergy between the band that, unfortunately, success and time eroded," Barbiero says. "The 'Sweet Child' mix stands out in my mind, because it sounded like a hit to all of us."

Released on June 3, 1988, "Sweet Child o' Mine" was Guns N' Roses' first — and only — number 1 single. (Unfortunately, the relationship that inspired the song would not fare as well: Rose and Everly wed in 1990, but their marriage was annulled a year later, and in 1994 she filed a multimillion-dollar lawsuit, later settled out of court, charging him with abuse.) *Appetite for Destruction* had been out since July 21, 1987, but sales skyrocketed in the wake of the crossover appeal engendered by the hit ballad. The record would eventually sell more than 20 million copies worldwide.

And "Sweet Child o' Mine"? It took a while, but Slash eventually developed a grudging affection for the song he once likened to an unpleasant dental procedure.

"I heard it on the radio last night, actually," says the guitarist, who now plays in Velvet Revolver alongside McKagan and Matt Sorum, Adler's replacement in GN'R. "Hearing it now it brings back a flood of memories. Around 1991 it would cause such a reaction that just playing the first stupid notes used to evoke hysteria, so I started to appreciate it. Guns N' Roses were probably one of the best rock & roll bands, and that was a classic fucking time." *BEN MITCHELL*

VITAL STATISTICS

SONG
"Sweet Child o' Mine"

ARTIST
Guns N' Roses

LABEL
Geffen

PRODUCER
Mike Clink

PERFORMERS
W. Axl Rose
vocals
Slash
guitar
Izzy Stradlin
guitar
Duff McKagan
bass
Steven Adler
drums

RELEASED
June 3, 1988

HIGHEST CHART POSITION
1

WEEKS ON CHART
24

W. AXL ROSE
Guns N' Roses' mercurial frontman and now the sole remaining member of the band's original lineup. Has interesting new "hair."

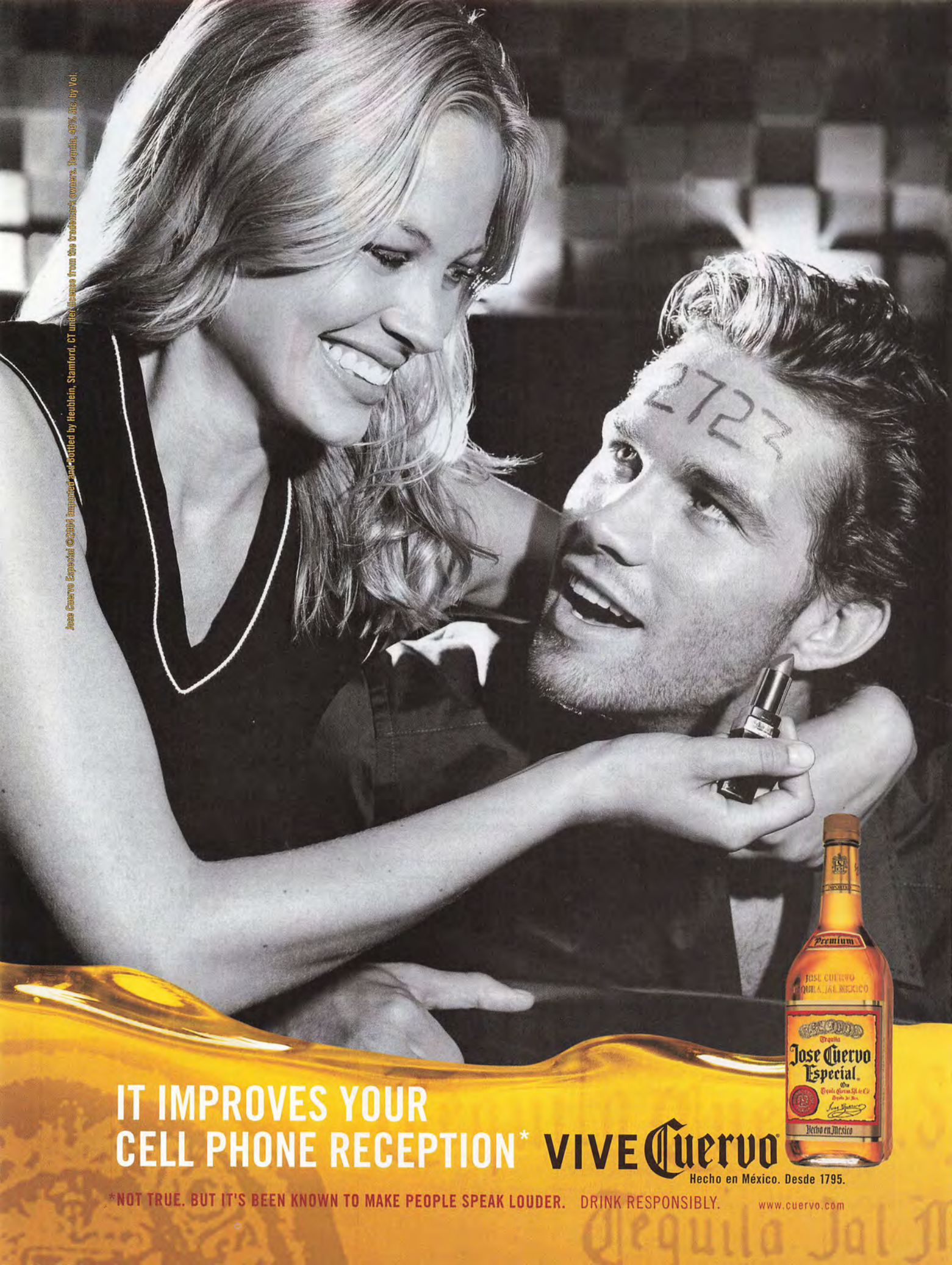
WHO'S WHO

SLASH
Inelegantly wasted guitarist. Is actually British. Made top hats acceptable, if not cool.

DUFF McKAGAN
Easygoing bass player. His high living took its toll when his pancreas exploded in 1994.

MIKE CLINK
Disciplinarian producer. Remained GN'R's choice in the studio. Also worked with Megadeth.

Lynn McAfee/Starfile (Guns N' Roses), Paul Natkin (Rose), LFI (Slash), Idols UK (McKagan), Mr. Snuggles (still-life)



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Ask Blender

SOLVING YOUR POP CONUNDRUMS SINCE 2001

Ma$e fails to notice glass door.

I know Ma$e left rap for religion, but what happened to him after that? Is he still practicing?

LORNA JENKINS, SAN JOSE, CALIFORNIA

You betcha! Since God told him in a vision that his rap career was effectively directing people to hell, the former Bad Boy big shot was reborn as Pastor Mason D. Betha. A popular inspirational speaker, he founded his own ministry and an interesting, if controversial, doctrine called "Total-Life Prosperity."

Based in Atlanta, his nondenominational S.A.N.E. Church (which stands for "Saving a Nation Endangered") is based upon the belief in "prosperity in every area of a person's life, primarily beginning with one's spiritual well-being, and also one's mind, body, family, money, etc."

But now, after five years of preaching, it seems Ma$e has missed the limelight. Though still under contract to Bad Boy, he has expressed interest in recording an album for Nelly's label, Fo' Reel. Ed Holmes, spokesman for Fo' Reel, has confirmed that negotiations are ongoing.

What happened to the ballet that Pink Floyd were working on after they made *Dark Side of the Moon*?

GERALD LEE, ITHACA, NEW YORK

The English rock legends did start working on a ballet in 1972 with French choreographer Roland Petit and legendary dancer Rudolph Nureyev. The event was even going to be turned into a Roman Polanski film.

But the chosen subject — Marcel Proust's immense experimental novel *A La Récherché du Temps Perdu* (*Remembrance of Things Past*) — caused problems. All four band members got bogged down trying to plow through the slow-moving tome. Guitarist David Gilmour reportedly got stuck at around 18 pages.

"I read the second volume," said singer Roger Waters. "When I got to the end of it I thought, 'Fuck this, I'm not reading any more. I can't handle it.' "

They reached a compromise of sorts: Between November 1972 and February 1973, for several performances in Paris and Marseilles, France, the band simply played existing material like "Obscured by Clouds" and "Echoes" while the Ballet de Marseille performed some old dance routines. The experience left the band nonplussed, and their short-lived ballet phase was over.

"In the end," Gilmour said, "the reality of all these people prancing around in tights in front of us didn't feel like what we wanted to do long-term."

Jane's Addiction: It's jaundice!

Jane says "Cheese!"

Who was Jane, and what was her addiction?

BLAINE MORRIS, PATERSON, NEW JERSEY

The Jane of Jane's Addiction fame is Jane Bainter, an old housemate of the band who was always claiming she would kick her addiction to heroin. Bainter lived with the future alt-rock legends and nearly a dozen other musicians in the early '80s at their notorious Hollywood abode.

Though well-liked, Jane was apparently a tempestuous figure who attracted questionable elements to the house. Any domestic strife was therefore blamed on "Jane's addiction." The phrase stuck in leader Perry Farrell's head when he formed a new group.

Bainter was unimpressed by the idea, but fairly sure the band was going nowhere, she reluctantly gave her blessing to the name; her picture was used on early fliers, and her signature became part of the band's first logo.

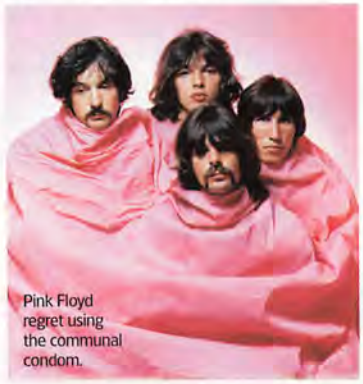
Following the group's success, she lost touch with her old friends, getting a job at Atlantic Records before serving as an adviser for an entertainment class at UCLA. These days, her addictions are all in the past. "The story of Jane has a happy ending," she said recently.

I heard that Aerosmith once filled an entire side of an album with a song called "The Cocksucker's Blues." True?

JOHN RUARK, VIA E-MAIL

You've got the wrong band: It was another little-known group called the Rolling Stones who, after launching their own label in 1970, found they owed Decca Records one more single.

The dirty dogs responded by submitting "Cocksucker Blues," a ribald little tune about a young male prostitute in London. The memorable chorus went: "Oh, where can I get my cock sucked?/Where can I get my ass fucked?/I ain't got no money/But I know where to put it every time." Elsewhere on the X-rated number, Mick Jagger sang about a policeman who "fucks me with his truncheon."



Pink Floyd regret using the communal condom.

The Stones recorded two versions in May 1970 at Olympic Studios in London — one Jagger/Keith Richards acoustic take and another version with the full band. The stuffy heads at Decca inevitably passed on the track, and the band was free. "I'd rather the Mafia than Decca," a relieved Richards said.

The song's only official release to date was as a limited-edition seven-inch single given away with a 1984 German box set, *Rest of the Best*.

Cocksucker Blues was also the name given to the famously unsavory unreleased documentary featuring footage of the Stones' 1972 tour — which included appetizing shots of Richards nodding out after a drug fix. [BLENDER]

YOUR QUESTIONS >>

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1040 Avenue of the Americas,
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New York,
New York 10018

E-mail:
askblender@blender.com

Please include your first and last name, your hometown and your state or province. Cool!

Dave Allocca/Stringer/Getty Images (Ma$e); Steve Double/RetnaUK (Jane's Addiction); Michael Ochs Archives.com (Pink Floyd)

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ACROSS 110TH STREET

"You can find it all in the street," sang Bobby Womack. How right he was! This month, alongside the mix-tapes and bootleg DVDs, you can discover the latest fall fashions, too.

FASHION BY KELLY RAE
PHOTOGRAPHY BY LEGO

ON MODEL: **GUESS?** AUTHENTIC HOODY, $79, AND NEW ORLEANS PANT, $119, GUESS? RETAIL STORES NATIONWIDE. HANGING, FROM LEFT: **SEVEN 2** BEAT DOWN JEAN, $70, MICHAEL K NYC; **M SASSON** SUSPENDER DENIM, $48, MSASSON.COM; **POLO JEANS CO.** RALPH LAUREN RACER SURPLUS JEAN, $79.50, MACY'S NATIONWIDE. ON GROUND, CLOCKWISE FROM TOP RIGHT: **DIESEL** RUMBUM COMFORT JEAN, $195, BLOOMINGDALE'S AND DIESEL.COM; **PLUGG** RUSTED DOUBLE BACK JEAN, $40, PLUGG.COM; **LEVI'S** PREMIUM, $110, LEVI.COM; **TOMMY JEANS** DEL LUDLOW JEAN, $55, 888-TOMMY-4-U; **JEAN PAUL DA'MAGE** ICE JEAN, $169, ATRIUM NYC

TOP ROW, FROM LEFT: **BEN SHERMAN** ARGYLE NEWSBOY CAP, $30, BENSHERMANUSA.COM; **REPUBLICA** WALKER FEDORA, $72, BLOOMINGDALE'S. CENTER: **PUMA** FELIDAE FEDORA, $27, PUMA.COM; **KANGOL** ROSS TOOTH JETFORD, $50, KANGOLSTORE.COM; **DIESEL** JOLIN-MALE FEDORA, $59, ATRIUM NYC OR DIESEL STORES NATIONWIDE; **BEN SHERMAN** ULTRA SUEDE DRIVER, $30, NORDSTROM. BOTTOM: **OBEY** BIG POPPA, $24, DIGITALGRAVEL.COM; **KANGOL** DENIM ARMY CAP, $38, KANGOLSTORE.COM

CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: **G-UNIT** STRAPPS (SOLD AS SET), $159.90, MACY'S EAST AND WEST; **DRAGONFLY** TRACK JACKET, $69, DRAGONFLYCLOTHING.COM; **DRUNKNMUNKY** HIP HOP CLASSICS O.G. SET, $75, DRUNKNMUNKY.COM; **AKADEMIKS** THE NEW CASTLE, $164, MACY'S EAST; **PUMA** 1972 TRACK JACKET, $70, PUMA.COM; **BEN SHERMAN** POLICE, $79, NORDSTROM

BOTTOM, FROM LEFT: **TOMMY JEANS** SHOT MAKER, $65, TOMMYJEANS.COM OR 888-TOMMY-4-U; **GBX** BANNER, $50, GBXSHOE.COM; **PHAT FARM** HAMPTON FLAG, $60, 129 PRINCE STREET, NYC; **OAKLEY** RACE BOOT, $250, OAKLEY.COM. MIDDLE, FROM LEFT: **KENNETH COLE** CURVE AND SERVE, $85, 800-KEN-COLE OR KENNETHCOLE.COM; **FILA** ITALIA LOW, $64.95, FILASTORE.COM; **REEBOK** G6, $90, REEBOK.COM. TOP, FROM LEFT: **LACOSTE** VELCRO STRAP, $95, LACOSTE NYC, 212-459-2300; **K-SWISS** THE AMESTOY, $60, FOOT LOCKER; **DIESEL** LETTER, $99.95, DIESEL.COM; **JACK PURCELL**, $90, CONVERSE.COM

PROP STYLING LISA GWILLIAM

"Let's Go and Shoot Things!"

Swedish rockers **the Hives** attempt to spend $848 on guns, booze . . . and making Sting feel bad!

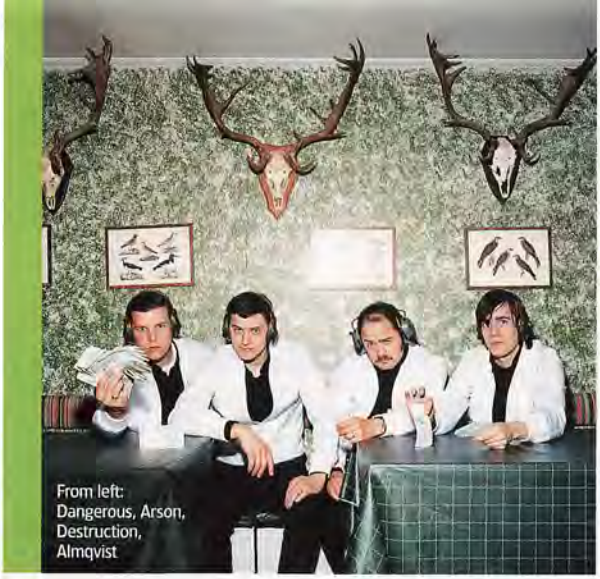
BY ADRIAN DEEVOY
PHOTOGRAPHY BY ELLIS PARRINDER

SPEND OUR CASH!

THE BAND
The Hives

THE MISSION
To spend ~~$848~~ 6,500 KRONOR in one day any way they want

THE REASON
Blender asked them to!



From left: Dangerous, Arson, Destruction, Almqvist

"WE DIDN'T WANT to do anything too typical of Sweden," says the Hives' Howlin' Pelle Almqvist while idly leafing through a copy of *Blender*. "It would be easy to blow the money in record shops and bars like the Vines did, but there's no challenge in that. We wanted to do something different. But non-Swedish."

In keeping with this plan, he agrees that the Hives will probably not be taking part in the proposed herring-eating/porn-watching marathon that *Blender* was so looking forward to. "That would just be a normal night at home for us, anyway," he shrugs, then falls silent over a thought-provoking Courtney Love photo spread.

As the praying mantis–shaped singer expertly examines the photographs — "Ooh, my God" — *Blender* takes the opportunity to study the environs in which the Hives have chosen to spend their $848. (This translates into roughly 6,500 Swedish kronor, which is currently in a roll large enough to choke a walrus.)

We are in a compact log cabin some 40 miles from the Hives' Stockholm base. The walls are covered with the massive skulls and antlers of deceased red deer stags. The cupboards are piled high with guns and ammunition; one contains a large quantity of fortified wine. Have the Hives decided to spend their cash on some sort of drunken killing spree? "Put it this way," says bassist Dr. Matt Destruction, "I like my steak fresh."

"Let's put it this way: I like my steak fresh."

Welcome to the Skoklosters Skeetklubb, a private shooting and hunting club set amid scenery that easily could be, and most likely has been, the backdrop for many a mineral-water commercial. Silvery lakes, dense pine forests, rolling meadows, the works. And all under a perfect *Simpsons* sky. On the drive up here, we had to stop to let a moose and his family cross the road. So far, so Swedish. "I guess so," says Almqvist, enigmatically adjusting his interesting hairdo. "Anyway, let's go and shoot some things."

Thankfully, the things in question are small orange discs, which will be propelled into the air at considerable speed. The Hives' job is to gun the mothers down in the most terminal manner possible. "I'm looking forward to this," declares the ferociously blue-eyed guitarist Nicolaus Arson, who, even without a high-caliber rifle in his hand, has a mildly psychotic air about him.

The four Hives (fifth member Vigilante Carlstroem is on paternity leave) troop across a flat field to the shooting range in matching white satin rockabilly jackets, tight black trousers and white patent shoes, carrying half-cocked shotguns. It's *The Deer Hunter* meets *Grease 2*!

Having adjusted their bang-muffling headsets and loosened up with a few warm-up rounds, the Hives' sweet Swedish manner is soon forgotten, and battle commences. Jackets are discarded, brows glisten with sweat, guttural Scandinavian swear words are uttered.

Almqvist is having trouble adjusting his eye-line and cleverly improvises by positioning some spare headphones over his left eye. Drummer Chris Dangerous impressively nails four flying orange targets in succession, prompting his bandmates to speculate over his former life as an assassin. Dr. Destruction, it is decided, was probably just a workaday sniper.

Unsurprisingly, Arson proves to be something of a crack shot and strikes an alarming firing-squad stance whenever it's his turn to burn cartridge. It is later agreed that *Firing-Squad Stance* would make a fine title for the Hives' forthcoming, and as yet unnamed, album.

Even at the mixing stage, their third collection of short but savage songs would not disappoint the faithful. "The sound is a little more '80s power-pop in parts," explains Almqvist, an excellent day's shooting behind him. "But the feel is the same. The main difference is that the last album said, 'I am right' and this one says, 'You are wrong.' "

As we approach the Swedish hamburger restaurant Max, all that is wrong — aside from some sore shooting shoulders — is the amount of *Blender*'s money the Hives still need to spend: With midnight approaching, there is more than $400 remaining in the pot.

Luckily, Sweden is an expensive country — a can of beer costs $10 — and they have little trouble blowing $100 on conspicuously healthy-looking burgers, salads and luminous green pear-flavored milkshakes. But it is late and, despite the city's liberal demeanor, Stockholm closes early.

En route back to town, the Hives stop at a 7-Eleven and each purchase a copy of *Yellow Paper*, Stockholm's comprehensive classified ad magazine. "We'll call one of the vendors and buy something for 'the band who has everything,' " grins Arson.

Papers rustle and suggestions for potential purchases fly: an iguana, a set of golf clubs, a leather table, a motorized skateboard, a water-damaged turtle tank. Almqvist pauses at the gigs page. "We could buy five tickets to see Sting and not show up," he muses. "The empty seats would be good for his ego."

Chris Dangerous finds a nice pre-owned paper shredder. "We could buy that and then shred the rest of the krona," he offers, to snorts of derision.

Almqvist wants to find a long movie-theater line and pay for everyone, including themselves, to see a late-night film, but he fears that we have missed the last screening. Instead, he stops a group of kids on their way to a party. "Sing me a song and I'll pay you," he says, and on cue the 15-strong bunch launch into Elvis Presley's "(Marie's the Name of) His Latest Flame," followed by a sterling version of "Can't Help Falling in Love," complete with harmonies.

As the song reaches its emotional climax, the Hives move among the mildly bemused singers, handing out krona bills until they're down to their last $50. The street-corner choir murmur their thanks, depleted funds replenished, and head off to "buy booze, dude!"

Kind to a fault, the Hives' gangling frontman donates the remaining notes to the drivers who have patiently endured today's huntin', shootin' and fishin' for bargains. "Buy your wives a nice gift," he smiles, before remembering that he is still on promotional duty. "Such as the Hives' third album! Out this July! They'll love it!" [BLENDER]

WHO'S WHO IN MICHAEL'S MAGIC KINGDOM?

Jacko's Wackos!

He's been charged with five counts of child molestation. He's alleged to have plied a 12-year-old cancer survivor with wine and pills, molested him, imprisoned him and planned to hide him in Brazil. Now an ever-shifting cast of competing advisers, doctors, lawyers and religious leaders struggle to keep their paymaster out of jail. But who's in, who's out — and who's organizing the screenings of *Willy Wonka* — in the crazy court of the King of Pop?

BY ANDREW GOLDMAN

MICHAEL JACKSON

Pop singer, lives in "Neverland"

Currently facing charges of child molestation, debts believed to be in the region of $200 million, record sales in terminal decline and some apparent difficulties with plastic surgeons. As a child, he was called "Big Nose" by his father.

1 ADVISERS

AL MALNIK

Financier with connections?

Although his Rolls-Royce has been bombed and his business partners have done time, Malnik denies mob connections. With Charles Koppelman, now co-controls Jackson's money, having helped bail him out of debt last year.

FIRPO W. CARR

Jackson family "spiritual adviser"

The verbose Jehovah's Witness, author and friend of **Jermaine Jackson** was all over cable television vouching for Michael's unmolesting ways — until the pop star wrote him a letter asking him to stop.

FRANK DiLEO

Potty-mouthed former manager

DiLeo baby-sat Jackson — who nicknamed him "Uncle Tookie" — during *Thriller*, only to be fired in 1989 after *Bad* sold disappointingly. Tookie and his old charge were in L.A. for private meetings in January.

DIETER WIESNER

Unsavory German businessman

Wiesner has concocted countless Jackson business schemes. He reportedly owns sex clubs in Germany and was booted from the inner circle by **Leonard Muhammad**.

LEONARD MUHAMMAD

Bow-tied Islamist

A son-in-law of Nation of Islam leader Louis Farrakhan, Muhammad is the organization's chief of staff and provided security for Jackson last winter before reportedly taking control of his legal strategy and purse strings — but then, in April, he was banished by Jackson's new lawyer **Thomas Mesereau**.

RONALD KONITZER

Unsavory Vancouver-based businessman

With **Dieter Wiesner**, is behind a slew of Jackson-themed business schemes called "MJ Universe." Konitzer was ousted by Jackson in the Nation of Islam housecleaning.

2 DOCTORS

DR. STEPHEN HOEFFLIN

D-cup implant-stuffing plastic surgeon

Hoefflin regularly worked on Jackson's nose after giving him his first rhinoplasty in 1979. Claims he refused to perform further surgery in 1998, fearing for the remaining tissue.

DR. SEBI

Desiccated Central American herbalist

Degree-free septuagenarian Dr. Sebi has treated Jackson for alcohol and pill addiction since 2003 and was flown to Jackson's rented Aspen villa last February to perform an herbal detoxification.

DR. ARNOLD KLEIN

Botox-squirting Beverly Hills dermatologist

Responsible for Jackson's skin-bleaching regimen and for introducing him to his future wife — Klein's medical assistant **Debbie Rowe**. Also treated **Elizabeth Taylor**; was sued last year when a patient accused him of giving her a Botox OD.

3 ANTAGONISTS

MARTIN BASHIR

British TV journalist

The widely disliked, devoutly Christian Bashir's interview with Jackson aired on *20/20* and featured Jackson singing the praises of sleepovers with young boys. It led to Jackson's eventual arrest.

ALLEGED VICTIM #1

Former playmate

The boy met Jackson in 1992 and later alleged that the singer fellated and fondled him. His family agreed to a reported $25 million settlement with the star, and he may testify in Jackson's current case.

ALLEGED VICTIM #2

An East L.A. kid from a broken home who was 10 when he met Jackson in 2001 — after having a tumor removed from his kidney. In **Martin Bashir**'s documentary, the boy admitted to sleeping in Jackson's bed. He should testify that Jackson gave him wine and pills, showed him and his brother pornography and fondled him on many occasions.

Ray Mickshaw/Wireimage.com (Malnik); Reuters/Corbis (Jackson); Mario Anzuoni/Splash News (Klein); EPA Photos/Newscom.com (Bashir)

4 LAWYERS

MARK GERAGOS
Walrus-like defense counsel

Attorney hired by Jackson to investigate the accuser and his family months before Neverland was raided. Geragos also defended Winona Ryder, embattled congressman Gary Condit and accused wife- and baby-killer Scott Peterson. In April, he was replaced as Jackson's co-lead counsel by **Thomas Mesereau** — possibly because Jackson had never expected to be indicted for molestation.

R. BRIAN OXMAN
Silver-haired, media-happy attorney

Was kept busy for more than a decade on family business by Jackson's father, **Joseph Jackson**. Oxman seemed a hanger-on, but he had a say in hiring **Thomas Mesereau**.

THOMAS MESEREAU JR.
Sober, Little Dutch Boy–impersonating lawyer

Counsel for alleged wife-killer Robert Blake, Mesereau was Jackson's first choice of attorney. Was finally hired just in time for the star's April indictment.

5 EMPLOYEES

MIKE LAPERRUQUE
Personal bodyguard

An ex-sergeant in the Los Angeles County sheriff's department, Jackson's bodyguard from 2001 to 2003 attended the star around the clock and says he never saw him do anything untoward.

RAYMONE BAIN
Undiscerning publicist

D.C. flack for Serena Williams and Mike Tyson, and former PR rep for crack-smoking mayor Marion Barry, Bain was installed as Jackson's mouthpiece in February in time to announce the firing of **Mark Geragos**.

GRACE RWARMBA
The nanny

Once "personnel director" of Jackson's MJJ Productions, Rwarmba minds his brood and was in Berlin to witness the baby-dangling. She is a Muslim who reportedly encouraged Jackson to embrace the Nation of Islam.

F. MARC SCHAFFEL
Tubby gay-porn director

Produced the unreleased 9/11 charity single "What More Can I Give" and helped pry $5 million out of Fox for Jackson's outtakes of the **Bashir** show.

FRANK TYSON
Bedmate-turned-aide

Jackon's onetime playmate helped look after Jackson's accuser and family, and allegedly told the boy he would kill his little brother if he told anyone about drinking wine with Jackson.

ICON KEY

- ON THE RISE
- IN DECLINE
- STEADY
- ..... LINKED WITH

6 FRIENDS

ELIZABETH TAYLOR
Multiply wedded elderly sex symbol

Miffed after buddy Jackson blew off a date, Taylor failed to invite him to her seventy-first birthday party and called in sick to his support rally at Neverland last November.

ROGER FRIEDMAN
Fox News gossip monkey

The ubiquitous New York writer of the online show-biz column *Fox 411* is a boon to Jackson defenders, reporting every error that Santa Barbara D.A. Thomas Sneddon has made in his prosecution.

URI GELLER
Spoon-abusing Israeli mentalist

Was introduced to Jackson by rich conspiracy theorist Mohammad al Fayed. Jackson was best man at Geller's 2001 wedding, but Geller spoiled things by vouching for TV journalist **Martin Bashir**.

DARRYL STRAWBERRY
Born-again rehab regular

The former Met turned up at Neverland last December with sexy televangelist Paula White for some closed-door prayer during Jackson's "You Are Not Alone" rally.

CHRIS TUCKER
Squeaky comedian

The *Rush Hour* star contributed a jivey intro to Jackson's nonstarting single "You Rock My World." They were introduced by Jackson's cancer-stricken accuser.

BRETT RATNER
Carb-faced film director

Cherishes his private screenings of *Willy Wonka and the Chocolate Factory* with Jackson and promised him a role in *Rush Hour 3*. Jackson performed a personalized version of "Billie Jean" for Ratner's answering-machine message.

7 FAMILY

DEBBIE ROWE
Second wife

After a three-year marriage that yielded two perfectly white kids, ex-dermatologist's assistant Rowe got millions for a divorce in 1999, then went on TV to say that Jackson is a perfect father to the children she never sees.

JERMAINE JACKSON
Capricious older brother

The first family member to come to Michael's defense. He also recorded the Michael-bashing single "Word to the Badd" in 1991, married his brother Randy's ex-wife and named his son Jermajesty.

JOSEPH AND KATHERINE JACKSON
Pugilistic parents

As a child, Michael was so afraid of his abusive father that he would vomit at the very sight of him. Michael's troubled relationship with his father prevents either of his parents from exerting any real influence.

PARIS MICHAEL KATHERINE JACKSON
Blonde daughter, 6

Whisked away from **Debbie Rowe** immediately after birth. Jackson told **Martin Bashir** that he wouldn't mind letting Barry Gibb sleep in the same bed with Paris and her two siblings.

PRINCE MICHAEL JOSEPH JACKSON JR.
Son, 7

Jackson told the glossy British tabloid *OK!* that all he wanted for his son was for him to grow up in a normal household. Prince told **Martin Bashir**, "I haven't got a mommy."

PRINCE MICHAEL II, A.K.A. "BLANKET"
Towel-wearing younger son

Born to an unidentified surrogate mother in 2002, Blanket found true fame last November when his father dangled him from a fourth-floor balcony at the Adlon Hotel in Berlin.

Jim Ruymen/Reuters/Corbis (Geragos); Jim Ruymen/Reuters/Landov (Mesereau); Pool/Reuters/Newscom.com (Bain); Jeff Kravitz/Filmmagic.com (Taylor); Douglas Kirkland/Corbis (Strawberry); Sara De Boer/Retna Ltd. (Tucker); BusinessWire/Reuters/Newscom.com (Rowe); Alpha Globe Photos (Prince Michael)

FRANZ FERDINAND
From left: Bob Hardy, Nick McCarthy, Paul Thomson, Alex Kapranos

THE BLENDER 100

For the second annual Blender 100, we scoured the four corners of the oddly square-shaped globe for the hottest bands, films, comedians, trends and crunktastic beverage containers. There's no need to thank us. But a hug is always nice

BY JON CARAMANICA, NICK CATUCCI, CLARK COLLIS, NICK DUERDEN, ADAM HIGGINBOTHAM, PAULINE O'CONNOR, ANDY PEMBERTON, GABE SORIA, JONAH WEINER AND DOUGLAS WOLK

PHOTOGRAPHY BY PEROU

100
FRANZ FERDINAND

The Scottish quartet say goodbye to "ass scars" and hello to global success

"RECENTLY, I SAW the scars on his bum," says Franz Ferdinand guitarist Nick McCarthy, cackling with laughter. He is referring to two neat incisions where the butt cheeks meet the upper thighs of drummer Paul Thomson.

Times were once so tight for the members of Scotland's hippest new band that the doughty sticksman sold his ass — quite literally. He flogged the fat from his buttocks to medical science for $500.

"He showed us them after we'd been asking him for ages," continues giggly Englishman McCarthy, 29. "He's got two little scars where they stuck a big needle in and sucked it all out. He got only half the money he was promised. He thought the money was for one cheek, but it was for both cheeks."

"IT" IMPORTS

Franz Ferdinand have spent the last few years avoiding serious work in favor of living in ass-selling penury while pursuing their musical dreams. Luckily, their commitment to job-shy aestheticism has finally paid off: The Glasgow-based bohos are now tipped to become the band most likely to succeed the Strokes as princelings of sexy alt-rock.

Making music as lusty as it is danceable, and influenced by taut '80s guitar bands Joy Division and the Gang of Four, the quartet have even been known to employ a loose disco beat on spiky, guitar-driven songs like the surprise hit "Take Me Out." Their eponymous debut album, released on an obscure indie label overseas, has been picked up stateside for a rumored $1 million. That'll buy a whole lot of ass meat.

The band members, all in their twenties, met in and around the Glasgow School of Art. Bass player Bob Hardy, 23, was a student, while drummer Thomson, 27, was a model.

"My girlfriend and Nick McCarthy's girlfriend were at art school together," explains lead singer Alex Kapranos, 29. "So both our girlfriends and Bob had to draw Paul nude at some point."

The band soon became well-known for playing surreal gigs in depressed Glasgow's many empty urban spaces. They further set themselves apart by dressing smartly on- and offstage in colorful shirts and adopting short-at-the-sides, floppy-on-top hairstyles redolent of '80s Scottish avant-garde funksters Orange Juice. Cultured singer-guitarist Kapranos also liked to encourage audience members to sit on a rocking horse mid-set and shoot an air rifle at a target.

"I could talk for hours and read a million meanings into it," Kapranos explains. "But the basic thing is, it was a good laugh. People were whooping like cowboys."

But just don't call this sort of thing "arty."

"I hate the word *arty*," Kapranos says defensively. "Arty seems to be a dismissive term used by people to describe something they don't get and feel a little bit awkward around."

Still, the band came to life after an argument concerning the essence of art. And they're named after Archduke Franz Ferdinand — whose assassination touched off World War I — because "it's one moment in history when nothing was the same again."

That's pretty arty.

"But we also liked the sound of the name," says Kapranos, a man who seems to enjoy explaining things. "That's the essence of my favorite kind of pop music: It sounds good; you don't have to have anything more to do with it if you don't want to. But if you do look into it further, it does have a little more depth or drama."

Passion — or lust — also seems to be a central concern. "Take Me Out" features two snipers — one of whom begs the other to "take me out" rather than prolong the tension between them. It is, Kapranos says, an allegory for love. "Michael," meanwhile, is a steamy love song directed at a man.

Is there perhaps something about Franz Ferdinand that they'd like to get off their chests?

"No," Kapranos says, grinning. "It's called an imagination."

"It's actually about two friends of ours," says McCarthy. "they got off with each other in the middle of a crowded dance floor. That's what all our songs are about: the extremes of human feeling in everyday life." *ANDY PEMBERTON*

ODDS OF BLENDER 100 APPEARANCE IN 2005: 15-1

99
CRUNK CONTAINER
GASOLINE CANS

Let's face it: Flasks are for wimps. Step into any Dirty South club, and chances are good you'll see MCs and partiers alike guzzling booze from gallon gas cans (the choice mix is Hennessy and Red Bull). Lil Jon explains, "You can get a lot in there — and it looks gangsta!"

98
ROCKIN' ROCKUMENTARY
SOME KIND OF MONSTER

Never devil worshipers, Metallica struggle mightily with their inner demons (and one another) in this close-up look at the recording of *St. Anger*: James Hetfield groans about rehab, Lars Ulrich deals with Dad and the band shrink prevents total meltdown. Remember, future metal gods — hugs, not drugs.

97
CAN'T STOP, WON'T STOP
GHOSTFACE

By now, the Wu-Tang Clan's halcyon days seem as distant as those of the 1986 Mets — the brilliant exception is Ghostface, whose fourth CD, *The Pretty Toney Album*, debuted in the Top 10, full of classic soul samples and hysterical thug tales.

96
WAY DEAD
GRAM PARSONS

Country-rock imagineer Parsons overdosed in 1973, then his body was kidnapped and cremated in the Joshua Tree desert. Thirty-one years later, there's a biopic starring Johnny Knoxville as the corpse-snatcher and also July tribute concerts in L.A. and Santa Barbara with Lucinda Williams, Beck and Norah Jones.

95
CUTE CUTIE
BEN GIBBARD

Baby-faced balladeer knocks 'em dead in *The O.C.*

He started Death Cab for Cutie as a solo project, but seven years later, Ben Gibbard's Seattle quartet has become the cuddly public face of emo — "The Sound of Settling" is the prep-school anthem of the year. Meanwhile, Gibbard's synth-pop collaboration-by-mail with L.A.'s Jimmy Tamborello, the Postal Service, topped the college charts last year. On top of all that, Death Cab gets name-dropped constantly by Adam Brody (as Seth Cohen) on *The O.C.* "It's a little surreal," Gibbard admits.

ODDS OF BLENDER 100 APPEARANCE IN 2005: 25-1

94
EWWW . . . AWWW!
MARILYN MANSON AND DITA VON TEESE

The Goth Nick-and-Jessica

"Do you, God of Fuck, take the Queen of Burlesque to be your unlawful, weirded wife . . . " On March 22, Marilyn Manson broke the hearts of heavily tattooed, Anne Rice–reading goth chicks everywhere by proposing — on his knees! — to his long-time paramour, the often scantily clad performance artist Dita Von Teese. Their wedding is expected to take place within the year, to be followed, presumably, by the pitter-patter of tiny cloven hooves.

ODDS OF BLENDER 100 APPEARANCE IN 2005: 40-1

Clockwise from top left: Perou; George Campos; Andy Cantillon/Retna Ltd.

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93

VELVET REVOLVER

Before Slash's new band could get a-rockin', they had to get Scott Weiland off heroin

HIDDEN IN AN anonymous building in the industrial hinterlands of Burbank, California, Velvet Revolver's studio is decorated in a manner befitting L.A. rock aristocracy: The walls are hung with gold and platinum discs and Oriental carpets; the ceiling is swagged with red velvet drapes and hung with Chinese lanterns; plastic palm trees sprout among the amps. Then there's a final finishing touch: Almost completely obscuring the view through the Plexiglas window into the control room, raggedly spray-painted in giant, dripping, silver letters and followed by a giant, triangular exclamation point, are two words: *fucking fuck!*

ALL-STAR SURVIVORS!

"It's good to express yourself," explains bassist Duff McKagan, squinting through the indelible legend to where the technicians are setting up his equipment for the afternoon's rehearsal. "Scott did that," adds rhythm guitarist Dave Kushner. "He was in a bad mood. And he had a can of spray paint."

These days, Scott Weiland's moods are a little more predictable than they have been. Since the former Stone Temple Pilots frontman joined three ex-members of Guns N' Roses — McKagan, guitarist Slash, drummer Matt Sorum — and Kushner to form Velvet Revolver, his life has become much calmer. "I have better control of my impulses than I used to," Weiland says, in careful understatement. "You know, for a person who has poor impulse control like I do."

Weiland is now apparently finally free from the heroin addiction that dogged him for the past 10 years — partly as a result of joining a band entirely composed of some of the most infamous ex-junkies in rock. And Velvet Revolver have just made one of the most anticipated albums of the year. But don't dare call them a supergroup.

"I bristle," McKagan says, "when somebody calls this a supergroup — like a pre-put-together thing. This is so far from that."

★ ★ ★ ★ ★

AFTER PARTING company with volatile frontman Axl Rose in the '90s, the three former Guns N' Roses kept themselves busy. There were other bands, like Slash's Snakepit and the Neurotic Outsiders. McKagan, told after his pancreas exploded in 1994 that he could either stop drinking or die, spent three years at Seattle University earning a degree in finance and accounting.

They all played together again for the first time at a benefit gig in April 2002, and after recruiting Kushner to play rhythm guitar, began looking for a singer. From the start, they wanted Weiland — "He's the best rock & roll singer in the world," McKagan says — but he was still in Stone Temple Pilots. So they decided to advertise. They received thousands of submissions from all over the world. "We got the inevitable," McKagan says. "We'd hear the first two chords of 'Welcome to the Jungle,' and we'd just fucking take the CD out."

They auditioned 25 singers in person, but none was quite right. "It was tedious," Slash says. By February 2003, the band had been commissioned to record two songs for movie soundtracks but still had no frontman. But Stone Temple Pilots were disintegrating, making Weiland available after all. The only difficulty for the band — every one of them a former junkie or alcoholic — was that Weiland was still addicted to heroin. In May 2003, only days after announcing that he had joined the band, Weiland was once again arrested and charged with possession of narcotics.

After their experience with Rose, didn't the three consider just finding a singer who was normal?

"We've all got heavy-duty skeletal shit goin' on in the closet," Slash says. "We only feel comfortable with somebody who was in some way maladjusted."

Slash says he never gave Weiland any specific advice about kicking the drug. "We had a serious confrontational meeting early on, where I flat-out told him, 'It only leads to one thing: You're gonna die. Probably sooner than you'd planned.' "

"These guys have all been arrested numerous times," Weiland says. "They understand. They've been very supportive."

Before they began work on the album, McKagan took Weiland on a martial-arts retreat in the mountains of Washington — the same regimen McKagan himself had used to overcome his own drug addiction. When they returned, they began whittling down the 60 songs they had written for the album that would become *Contraband*.

> **"We've all got heavy-duty skeletal shit goin' on in the closet."** SLASH

Weiland wrote all the lyrics for the resulting 13 songs, and they include some of the most personal words he's ever written: charting his struggle with depression and addiction, and his alienation from the Hollywood rock-star lifestyle. While still committed to rehab through the recording of the album, Weiland has now completed his court-ordered treatment, is clean again and has reunited with his wife and two children. It's his family, he says, who finally persuaded him to put the drugs behind him.

"It's only so long that you can live life for yourself," he says.

Meanwhile, Axl Rose is going through his same old problems — as Guns N' Roses once again falls apart around him. Would anyone in Velvet Revolver consider getting the old GN'R lineup back together again?

"No fuckin' way," Slash says firmly.

ADAM HIGGINBOTHAM

ODDS OF BLENDER 100 APPEARANCE IN 2005: 100-1

Velvet Revolver, from left: Duff McKagan, Slash, Scott Weiland, Matt Sorum, Dave Kushner

PHOTOGRAPHY BY PATRICK HOELCK

MARY
IS MY
HOMEGIRL

Yeah Yeah Yeahs: "Give us a raise, or we jump!"

92

BREAKOUT BALLADEERS

YEAH YEAH YEAHS

Brooklyn's punky princess shows sensitive side

Karen O is known for onstage antics including, but not limited to, shoving her crotch at the front row and pouring beer down the front of designer dresses. But their power ballad, "Maps," conquered MTV2 on the strength of a few spilled tears: Karen cries an oath of fidelity into a clutched mic, and skinniest guitarist alive Nick Zinner wrenches out a squalling solo. The single shot new life into the trio's major-label debut, *Fever to Tell*, pushing it back up the charts. This fall the band will release a DVD of videos and live footage and begin recording a new album. Let's toast to that!

ODDS OF BLENDER 100 APPEARANCE IN 2005: 12-1

91

NORAH, SCHMORAH!

NELLIE MCKAY

She croons! She raps! She won't take her clothes off for us!

Starting a beef with Norah Jones doesn't exactly make you a badass, but 20-year-old Nellie McKay — who named her rollicking, slyly effusive debut *Get Away From Me* in answer to Jones's *Come Away With Me* — croons, belts and even raps about obnoxious men, war and kittens with daring befitting a sensitive thug. And she warns *Blender* that "I'm not gonna wear a bikini to be on the cover of your rag!" Naked it is, then!

ODDS OF BLENDER 100 APPEARANCE IN 2005: 20-1

Nancy Reagan called: She wants her dress back.

90

CELEBRITY BLOGGER

FRED DURST

Did you know that Fred Durst is a fan of Nietzsche or that he is "very sensitive [to] touch and smell"? You would if you logged onto the singer's oft-updated blog, American Aliens, a safe place where Durst muses, mostly on his own thoughts and his "ever so changing place within [his] mind."

89

THE NEXT 50 CENT

THE GAME

Compton's The Game, né Jayceon Taylor, began rapping after catching some bullets in 2001 and quickly caught the ears of Dr. Dre and 50 Cent, who signed him to G-Unit Records. The deal hasn't softened the 24-year-old: Check his mix-tape disses against Joe Budden for a lesson in blistering beef.

88

ALTERNATIVE TO WORK

AUDIOBLOGS

They're just like regular Weblogs, except they also include MP3s — new ones every day, often including rare or not-yet-released songs. Fluxblog, Soul Sides and Tofu Hut are three of the best, curated by crate-digging fanatics.

87

UNPRONOUNCEABLE — BUT FUNKY!

!!!

A septet of twitchy, grumbly groovateers who moved from the Bay Area to Brooklyn a while back, they've unleashed their long-awaited brittle funk-bomb, *Louden It Up*, and will be making hipster hips do the double-bump across America this summer.

86

BEST BLEEPS

VINTAGE VIDEO GAME SOUNDS

Yesterday's irritating computer noises become today's hip musical inspiration

Bling-bling rappers and retrophiles alike have tapped the sounds of pizza-parlor video games for their electro amusement. Lil' Flip raps over Pac-Man bleeps on his crunk hit "Game Over"; indie oddballs Monotrona, the Minibosses and the Advantage cover '80s console themes; and a new wave of avant-garde composers make music on Game Boys (check out Bit Shifter, for one), ensuring that bullies will jank their lunch money well into old age.

ODDS OF BLENDER 100 APPEARANCE IN 2005: 75-1

85

BEST BOX-OFFICE BOMB

DONNIE DARKO

The best movie starring Patrick Swayze and a six-foot rabbit gets rereleased

Failed to fully grasp this cult classic's mix of oversize imaginary bunnies and classic '80s songs the first time around? Rectify that situation by catching the new director's cut, in theaters now — it boasts more scenes, music and rabbit-related weirdness. Then please write *Blender* and tell us what the hell it's all about.

ODDS OF BLENDER 100 APPEARANCE IN 2005: 500-1

Clockwise from top left: Ophelia Wynne/Camera Press/Retna Ltd.; AP Wide World; Everett Collection; Chris Buck

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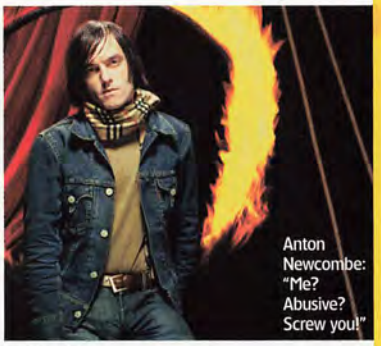
SALEM

stir the senses



Anton Newcombe: "Me? Abusive? Screw you!"

84

MOVIE MAYHEM

DIG!

Hilarious heroin-assisted Dandy Warhols/ Brian Jonestown Massacre documentary

"People say it's the best rock & roll documentary ever made," says Dandy Warhols singer Courtney Taylor. Part *Don't Look Back*, part *Hoop Dreams*, the winner of the best doc award at Sundance follows the contrasting careers of the Dandys and their doomed, druggy pals, the Brian Jonestown Massacre. The movie's star is the Massacre's intense, abusive singer, "angriest junkie in the world" Anton Newcombe. What does he make of the finished movie? "I think I look fucking handsome," he grunts.

ODDS OF BLENDER 100 APPEARANCE IN 2005: **250-1**

83

BEST SPONGEMONKEY ANIMATOR

JOEL VEITCH

The man who gave the world the Quizno's rodent thingies

Those Quizno's ads with the furry, googly-eyed singing creatures are the creation of this British animator, based on his Flash video for the brilliant/idiotic original song "We Like the Moon." (He claims his mission is "to destroy production values.") It appears at rathergood.com alongside a bunch of hysterical videos he has made for other bands, sometimes against their will. You'll have to hunt elsewhere, though, for his infamous video of Viking kittens declaiming Led Zep's "Immigrant Song."

ODDS OF BLENDER 100 APPEARANCE IN 2005: **60-1**

82

BIG GAY COMEBACK

JUDAS PRIEST

After 12 years with a substitute singer, during which time elastic-voiced original frontman Rob Halford announced he was gay (no way!), the leather-clad gods are making a thunderous return with a headlining Ozzfest slot and a four-disc retrospective.

81

PHAT FAT MC

SAGE FRANCIS

Stout and unshaven, he resembles a disgruntled bus driver more than an up-and-coming indie rap hero. But with lyrics full of personal turmoil and political fury, this Rhode Island MC is set for nerd-hop glory.

80

HIP-HOP HOLY MAN

MA$E

When Kanye West's favorite MC traded in mics and Jacob diamonds for pulpits and WWJD bracelets in 1999, he swore it was for good. But with a rumored deal with Nelly's Fo' Reel label, Mason Betha is set for a comeback — just don't expect any cursing.

79

INSTANT CONCERTIFICATION!

LIVE ALBUMS TO GO

How often have you left a Phish show and thought, "Wow, man, if only I could immediately relive that whole 17-hour experience?" Well, now you can, thanks to companies such as Instant Live, which burn bands' sets as they're being performed, allowing you to purchase a CD of the gig on your way to being mugged in the parking lot!

The Streets: "Oi! Where's my extra lard?"

78

WORD TO YOUR MUMS

THE STREETS

Literature professors love the British MC. So will you

WHEN MIKE SKINNER turned 14, he wanted to become a rapper. But geography was against him: He hails from Birmingham, England, rather than Birmingham, Alabama, so rapping didn't exactly come naturally.

"I wasn't hard enough," he says with a grin, "and no one was going to take me seriously if I tried to come over all Snoop Dogg."

Instead, Skinner is more of a spoken-word artist — the 24-year-old is a born storyteller, delivering slice-of-life tales over minimal beats with terrific results. He formed the Streets four years ago, and his wry debut, *Original Pirate Material*, sold more than a million copies worldwide.

Skinner's cult status is now seriously under threat. His new album, *A Grand Don't Come for Free*, documents a year in his life — girl trouble, money worries and an awful lot of marijuana — with a pathos that could transform him into a proper star, a kind of slow-motion Eminem. Literature professors are even deconstructing his lyrics for U.K. newspapers.

"Doors have been opening for me recently," he says of his success. "I'm loving it, but I've lost all sense of my reality, and that can be scary." He shrugs. "The terror of celebrity will probably be good for my songwriting." *NICK DUERDEN*

ODDS OF BLENDER 100 APPEARANCE IN 2005: **18-1**

PHOTOGRAPHY BY PEROU

Denis Kleiman/Retna Ltd. (Newcombe)

DEN
FISH BAR
PUKKA PIES
...they're delicious
OPEN
HOURS OF BUSINES
"The terror of celebrity will probably be good for my songwriting."

You'll *never* guess which is the Darkness's lead singer!

77

METAL MAESTROS

THE DARKNESS

We told you they rocked!

Genuflecting before Judas Priest and Queen, these pop-genius Brits riotously prove the timelessness of sleek '80s metal, monster ballads and spandex stuffing. Justin Hawkins's falsetto is the sound of hard-rock angst evaporating. In the year since we tipped them for the top, the Darkness have, like all good rock stars, played sold-out tours, recorded a hit single and spent $848 of *Blender*'s money . . . on a donkey.

ODDS OF BLENDER 100 APPEARANCE IN 2005: **14-1**

76

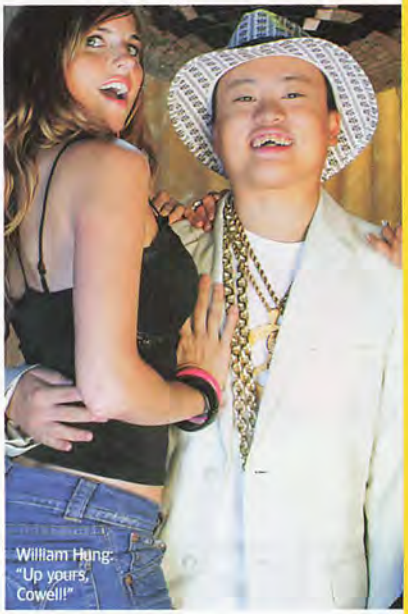
BEST OF THE WORST

IDOL REJECTS

Proof that your career isn't over just because Simon Cowell says it should be

Just ask runner-up Clay Aiken: Losing *American Idol* can be an even more lucrative path than winning. This summer, a whole phalanx of *Idol* also-rans — nerd pinup William Hung, military man Josh Gracin, bombastic soul siren Tamyra Gray, cipher RJ Helton — are making a run at the charts. Says second-season finalist Kimberley Locke, whose single "8th World Wonder" was a hit this spring, "I've got no more connections to *Idol*. I don't care if Simon's listened to my album, and I don't care if he likes it." Only Sideshow Bob look-alike Justin Guarini spoiled the party by getting dropped by his label.

ODDS OF BLENDER 100 APPEARANCE IN 2005: **35-1**



William Hung: "Up yours, Cowell!"

75

CULT CARTOON

AQUA TEEN HUNGER FORCE

Frylock, Meatwad and Master Shake are *Blender*'s type of superheroes: trash-talking refugees from a McDonald's value menu who listen to Schoolly D and are too lazy to fight crime. They're the breakout stars of Adult Swim, the Cartoon Network's late-night programming block for snickering stoners.

74

THE IRISH WILCO!

HAL

When England's Rough Trade label signs an act, *Blender* pays attention — the company's roster includes the Strokes and the Libertines. Rough Trade's latest find is Hal, a Dublin four-piece whose self-assured single "Worry About the Wind" blends Beach Boys romanticism with the Band's earthiness.

73

CALIENTE!

REGGAETON

A Puerto Rican hybrid of hip-hop, dancehall and salsa, reggaeton music is set to follow Jamaica's blast onto U.S. pop charts. The genre's breakout star is Tego Calderon, who shined last year on a remix of 50 Cent's "P.I.M.P."

72

MOVE OVER, TOM JONES

WALES

Croeso y Cymru! Or, should your Welsh be a little rusty, Welcome to Wales, the country that's currently exporting more hot young acts than any other, including nü-metallers Lostprophets, the much-tipped Funeral for a Friend and the Madonna-collaborating Jem.

71

B-BOY BEVERAGES

RAPPER SPORT DRINKS

Hydration help from Nelly, Fat Joe and Lil Jon

"This ain't no Bull," Fat Joe proclaims in his shill spots for Stinger, a new hip-hop-targeted energy drink that aims to upend the Red Bull monopoly. There's more where that came from: Rap impresario Russell Simmons launched DEFCON3 last year, and Nelly quickly followed with Pimp Juice. The latest entry into the field is Lil Jon's (called, inevitably, Crunk!!!). Says Jon: "We made an energy drink so we could have our own shit to drink with Hennessy. I've had women tell me it makes them horny." We're sold.

ODDS OF BLENDER 100 APPEARANCE IN 2005: **20-1**

70

TRIPLE THREAT

THE SECRET MACHINES

Two brothers and a pal make the year's biggest, best new noise

Thrilling and vast, this Brooklyn trio's live show is like a 747 zooming overhead in slow motion. The drums are among the heftiest you'll hear, with keyboards and distorted riffs droning, floating and gnawing above. The Secret Machines whipped up a froth of major-label excitement with a 2002 indie EP; their full-length debut, *Now Here Is Nowhere,* catapults them into the big leagues.

ODDS OF BLENDER 100 APPEARANCE IN 2005: **18-1**

Clockwise from top left: Nick Wilson/Camera Press/Retna Ltd.; Alphonse Telymonde; Lego; Victor Sanabrais/Corbis

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Modest Mouse audition newest animal sacrifice.

69

UNDERACHIEVERS ACHIEVE!

COLLEGE-ROCK GRADUATES

Modest Mouse, the Shins and Fountains of Wayne break through

What do Fountains of Wayne's "Stacy's Mom," Modest Mouse's "Float On" and the Shins' "Kissing the Lipless" have in common? Rachel Hunter, half-naked and writhing across a kitchen counter in the videos! OK, not really — each one is the most successful single in a band's long, heretofore thankless indie-circuit career. As Modest Mouse's Top 20 debut for their sixth album, *Good News for People Who Love Bad News,* proved, these three bands are role models for perseverance, uncompromising credibility and every other virtue that usually ensures extreme lifelong poverty.

ODDS OF BLENDER 100 APPEARANCE IN 2005: **40-1**

68

MR. NICE

WAYNE COYNE

The owner of rock's filthiest white suit just wants everyone to have a lovely time!

Anyone with dreams of becoming a universally beloved indie-rock icon could do worse than ask himself, "What would Wayne do?" Whether ruminating on the importance of intraband good vibes at a South by Southwest Q&A or being transported across the Coachella crowd via an inflatable plastic bubble, the Flaming Lips frontman has become music's own Christopher Walken — not necessarily the biggest star, but undeniably the coolest. Next year: a new Lips CD and their long-awaited movie, *Christmas on Mars.*

ODDS OF BLENDER 100 APPEARANCE IN 2005: **9-1**

Coyne: "You should see the other guy."

67

STATION MASTERS

ROCK-STAR DJS

Rewarding supportive DJs by, um, taking their jobs, the ever-increasing number of rock stars–turned–airwave celebrities includes former Sex Pistol Steve Jones, Little Steven and prime-time yakker Chuck D.

66

GANGSTA SCRIBE

DONALD GOINES

Addicted to heroin. Professional pimp. Shot dead by enemies — at his typewriter! This '70s crime novelist is second only to *Scarface* as a hip-hop cultural touchstone: Jadakiss, Nas and Tupac have all sung his praises, and his novel *Never Die Alone* inspired the recent DMX movie of the same name.

65

F**KING OPPORTUNISTS!

THE FCC

"Offended" by Janet's wardrobe malfunction and encouraged by Congress, the Federal Communications Commission now enforces strict rules against "profanity," newly defined in March as any "offensive" word or action. Fuck that shit!

64

FAST AND FURIOUS

HOMEMADE DRAG-RACE DVDS

Who needs Vin Diesel and Ludacris? Illegal street racers across the country are taking Handicams to makeshift drag strips and adding hip-hop soundtracks to the mayhem. Available on an urban street corner near you, DVDs with names like *The Fast and the Grimey* are filled with tricked-out cars and the cops who hate them.

63

BEST RAY CHARLES IMPERSONATOR

JAMIE FOXX

Hype funnyman turns serious for soul-legend biopic

Comedian, actor and Kanye West collaborator Foxx not only takes the lead in this fall's *Unchain My Heart: The Ray Charles Story,* but he also played all of the blind soul icon's piano parts in the biopic. "Ray's ageless," he says. "When we look in the mirror, we say, 'Oh, my face — I got a wrinkle.' He's never done that."

ODDS OF BLENDER 100 APPEARANCE IN 2005: **10-1**

62

EXHUMED FOLKIE

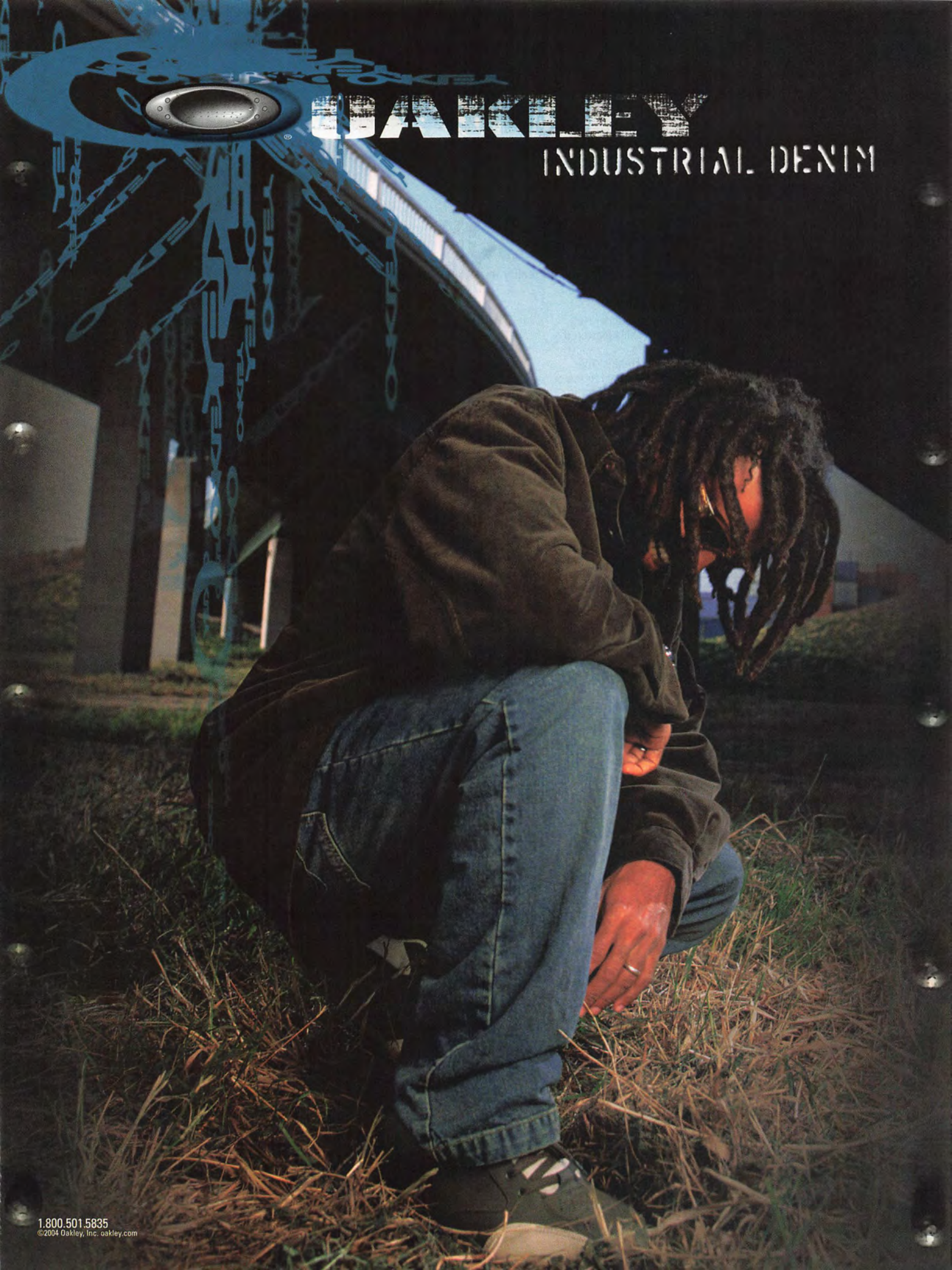
NICK DRAKE

He's bigger than ever — but alas, just as dead

For a dead guy, British cult-folkie Drake is having one hell of a year. His music was featured in the film *Garden State,* and last May the BBC broadcast a radio documentary on the singer-songwriter that was narrated by Brad Pitt. (Apparently the first rule of the Nick Drake Fan Club is that you *do* talk about it . . . .)

ODDS OF BLENDER 100 APPEARANCE IN 2005: **100-1**

Clockwise from top left: Michael Lewis/Corbis Outline; Matthew Jordan Smith/Corbis Outline; Keith Morris/Michael Ochs Archives.com; Drew Farrell/Retna Ltd.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61

THE SMART ONE

ASHLEE SIMPSON

She's young, beautiful and starring in her own MTV reality series. Sound familiar?

ASHLEE SIMPSON, younger sister of *The Newlyweds'* Jessica, is bouncing around her New York hotel room with an alarming smile plastered on her face.

"I'm so freaking excited!" she screams. The reason for her glee? This month sees the release of her self-titled debut album, which is far closer in style to, say, the energetic guitar-pop of Avril Lavigne than to her famous sister's Vegas balladry. Mention this to her, and her screams get louder still. "Thank you so much! I take that as such a compliment! This record is all about me coming out of her shadow."

An actress who already has a regular role on TV's *7th Heaven,* Simpson is nevertheless fated to follow in her sibling's footsteps with her imminent MTV reality show, entitled *Ashlee.*

"Yeah, but it's, like, not the same at all," she says, sounding like Frank Zappa's Valley Girl. "It's about me recording my album and everything that's influenced that. You know, living in L.A., falling in love, having my heart broken, being 19, meeting guys, things like that. I'm nothing like Jessica! We are so different!"

Who is the more intelligent?

Simpson's brow frowns. "Well, we both have, you know, different knowledge, but maybe I'm more street-smart?"

She does, presumably, know the difference between chicken and tuna?

"Absolutely! Of course I do!"

And here she screams again, laughs maniacally and falls off the bed.

NICK DUERDEN

"I'm nothing like Jessica! We are so different!"

ODDS OF BLENDER 100 APPEARANCE IN 2005: 20-1

PHOTOGRAPH BY SHERYL NIELDS

Styling by Turney & Leal for Artists by Timothy Priano, makeup by Karen Mitchell for Dior/celestineagency.com, hair by Ken Paves for Paves Professional at Luxe.
Prop styling by Robyn Breen, assistance by Doss. Slip dress by Hanah Li; shoes from Heroes by Cesare Paciotti; jewelry is Ashlee's own

Prince: "I can't go any lower than two bucks."

60

PURPLE REIGN II

PRINCE

Growing old, weirdly but gracefully

"Comeback?" Prince recently mused. "I never went anywhere!" True, the music industry–hating funkateer has released albums as frequently in recent times as he did during his '80s heyday — it's just that not many people have actually wanted to hear a single note of them. (2003's stinky *N.E.W.S.*, anyone?) This year's *Musicology*, however, has garnered the best reviews in years for the artist formerly known as the artist formerly known as Prince. Now, how about a Vanity 6 reunion?

ODDS OF BLENDER 100 APPEARANCE IN 2005: **16-1**

59

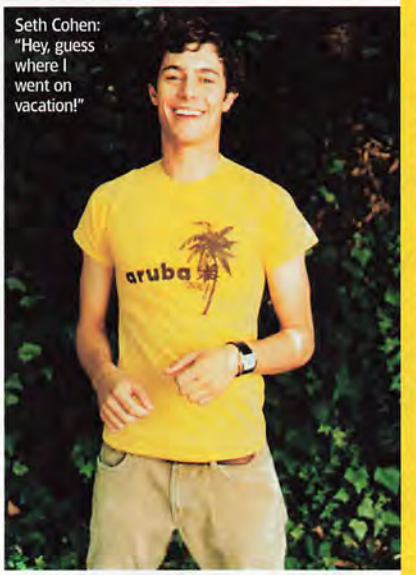
GEEK DREAMBOAT

SETH COHEN

***The O.C.*'s emo-lovin' anti-hunk**

Teen drama's coolest star isn't a leather-jacketed beefcake. He's wimpy, he wears cardigans and he knows all of the X-Men's alter egos. Cute but neurotic, Seth Cohen (Adam Brody) is half hipster, half Woody Allen. He's also the driving force behind *The O.C.*'s fantastic, indie-rock-heavy soundtrack: He gives Death Cab for Cutie CDs as holiday gifts to all his friends, adores Bright Eyes and held down the front row when SoCal popsters Rooney appeared on the show. Oh, and he somehow dates Summer, a popular cheerleader type, giving nerds everywhere hope.

ODDS OF BLENDER 100 APPEARANCE IN 2005: **25-1**



Seth Cohen: "Hey, guess where I went on vacation!"

58

NEW OLD INSTRUMENT

THE VIOLIN

It's more portable than a cello, less backwoods than a banjo, and Kanye West, Courtney Love and modern-rockers Yellowcard all distinguish their live and studio sounds with one. No, not the thumb piano — it's the violin!

57

CANUCK WEIRDOS

UNICORNS

A year ago, this eccentric trio had barely ventured out of their native Canada. But with the surprise success of *Who Will Cut Our Hair When We're Gone?*, a lo-fi, high-concept gem about ghosts, parasites and child stars, they've become savvy indie-rock Andy Kaufmans: lying to journalists and selling out their unpredictable live shows across the U.S.

56

PEE UNIT

R. KELLY'S LEGAL TEAM

If you're a well-off R&B crooner with a penchant for junior-league water sports, you could do with worse representation than Ed Genson, part of the legal team that has successfully held R. Kelly's kiddie-porn trial at bay for almost two years and even had some of the charges axed. Video tape, *schmideo* tape!

55

DOWNLOAD DORK

BRAM COHEN

This 29-year-old invented BitTorrent, a program that allows enormous files to be quickly downloaded from multiple sites at once, enabling fans to trade full concerts in CD-quality sound. Result: more String Cheese Incident than any human can bear.

54

THE FABULOUS VOICE OF . . .

CHRISTOPHER FLOCKTON

The Scottish narrator of VH1's celeb-obsessed hit

Want someone to make a music superstar's painful liposuction regime sound like the most glamorous thing ever? Then Flockton, the narrator of VH1's *The Fabulous Life* show, is most definitely your man. A Robin Leach for the bling-bling generation, the Edinburgh, Scotland-born theater veteran has a voice even richer, and in most cases considerably more classy, than the many people whose lives he details.

ODDS OF BLENDER 100 APPEARANCE IN 2005: **200-1**

53

MUST-SEE TEEN TV

THE N

They know what girls want . . .

Fourteen-year-old girls may be a mystery to their parents and boyfriends, but not to The N. The teen network, a nighttime Nickelodeon offshoot featuring lots of *Clueless* and *Daria* reruns, spins videos between programs and has helped launch off-center pop personalities like Ben Jelen, Black-Eyed Peas, Yellowcard and Joss Stone. Joe Fleischer, of Big Champagne, a firm that measures peer-to-peer file-trading, says, "The trading of Ben Jelen's songs is completely out of scope with the little amount of airplay he's gotten on radio. The N is special because it has such a well-targeted audience." Aww, The N is blushing.

ODDS OF BLENDER 100 APPEARANCE IN 2005: **8-1**

Marc Baptiste/Corbis Outline (Prince); courtesy of Christopher Flockton; Reggie Casagrande/Corbis Outline

I AM A Puddle. And Here for Quite a Substantial amount of Time, considering it hasn't rained in Like weeks. Yet somehow I prevail. Of course, along with me, prevail ALL sorts of unclassifiable microorganisms that I don't think have even seen the pages of Bio Textbooks as of yet. Not really sure. Didn't get all their names. And you probably won't either when you come rolling through here on your cruiser. NASTINESS AHOY!
But Take Warning, chance always seems to have it that these are the times you drop something - particularly tunes. And losing your player to a Puddle Like me could be terminal. Thankfully, you're packing SHOCKWAVE. MP3's never had it so good. water resistant, crash resistant, BMX-friendly.
So You keep your music playing and I'll keep hanging out until my number in the Rain cycle gets called.
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Conor Oberst: Guess who had his lunch money stolen again . . . .

52

INDIE ICON

CONOR OBERST

Pouty rock rainmaker plans world takeover!

Conor Oberst, winsome leader of baroque-pop Omaha collective Bright Eyes, is a man-boy of grand gestures. The recent NYC transplant plans to release two separate albums in January: an acoustic disc in keeping with his 2002 breakthrough, *Lifted* . . . , and an experimental set of collaborations recorded all over the musical map. (Country maverick Emmylou Harris contributed three songs in Nashville.) This year, he released EPs with Spoon's Britt Daniel and fellow Nebraskans Neva Dinova. A rumored track with Snoop Dogg could not be confirmed as of press time.

ODDS OF BLENDER 100 APPEARANCE IN 2005: 5-1

51

ITALIAN STALLION

ENNIO MORRICONE

Clint Eastwood *and* Uma Thurman kick ass to this man's music

This 75-year-old Spaghetti Western soundtrack king has been a hipster prestige item for decades — this summer, his score for *The Good, the Bad and the Ugly* returns remastered and expanded. Meanwhile, Quentin Tarantino smacked his boiling, brewing, howling pieces all over the soundtrack to *Kill Bill Vol. 2*.

ODDS OF BLENDER 100 APPEARANCE IN 2005: 300-1

Kill Bill: "Aren't you in ZZ Top?"

50

VH1 GODDESS

SHERYL CROW

While CD sales of other middle-agers such as Madonna, Bruce Springsteen and Crow's erstwhile employer Michael Jackson are in decline or free-fall, the appeal of La Crow continues to grow, as evidenced by her multiplatinum best-of. Hooking up with Tour de France–winning, zero-body-fat cyclist Lance Armstrong, however, is just showing off.

49

A-LIST ASSISTANT

FARNSWORTH BENTLEY

No longer just P. Diddy's parasol prince, man-of-taste Farnsworth Bentley is hip-hop's newest lifestyle accessory — dancing in Outkast videos and baby-sitting Puff's insta-rap troupe Da Band. Next move: a possible MTV show — and a line of high-end umbrellas, naturally.

48

GLAM SQUAD

SCISSOR SISTERS

Freaks, '70s revivalists, art-school ironists, call them what you will — this New York band's stage show is the sparkliest thing going, and their discofied remake of Pink Floyd's "Comfortably Numb" is the glitter-bomb.

47

GRIME KING

WILEY

The new sound of London

"Grime" is a new high-speed, garage-influenced, very British take on hip-hop with rinky-dink production that sounds like ancient Atari cartridges shooting off sparks. Dizzee Rascal brought it to America, but the king of the scene is his pal Wiley, a 24-year-old producer-MC who cranks out a track a month with names like "Icerink" and "Eskimo." He insists his music isn't grime, it's "eski beat." Long live the tyranny of small differences!

ODDS OF BLENDER 100 APPEARANCE IN 2005: 60-1

46

COOL KICKS

BATHING APE SNEAKERS

Strap these on and step out with hip-hop's big boys

Cassidy does the Chi-town step in these hard-to-find kicks. Pharrell, Usher and Jay-Z won't profile in anything less. Coming to a block near you? Not likely: The limited-edition Bapesta Force 1 sneakers, from Japanese clothing line Bathing Ape, retail for upward of $300. The tricolor dogs are must-haves for "uptown kids and industry kids," says Wil Whitney, partner in New York's trendy footwear shop Nom de Guerre. And they're patent leather, meaning your Hpno won't stain if you spill any.

ODDS OF BLENDER 100 APPEARANCE IN 2005: 1000-1

Lego (Oberst); Andrew Cooper/Miramax Films (*Kill Bill*); Reuters/Newscom (Morricone)

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Danger Mouse: "Screw it, I'm changing my name."

45

COOL COPYRIGHT INFRINGER

DANGER MOUSE

Mating the Beatles with Jay-Z made him DJ du jour

At the beginning of this year, Brian Burton was just another DJ. Then he unleashed *The Grey Album* — vocals from Jay-Z's *Black Album* mixed with music from the Beatles' *White Album*. Within days, he was famous, the Internet was ablaze with *Grey Album* MP3s (more than 100,000 people downloaded it in one day alone) and the music industry wanted to kick his ass. Now he's working with indie rappers Prince Po and MF Doom, and *The Grey Album* has gone back underground. "People want what they can't have," Burton says.

ODDS OF BLENDER 100 APPEARANCE IN 2005: **30-1**

44

RAP DANDY

CAM'RON

What do Roc-A-Fella's prize MC and Barney the Dinosaur have in common?

Last year, Harlem MC Cam'ron had thugs across the country aping his unlikely fondness for everything pink — his live performances looked like Mary Kay Cosmetics conventions. This year, though, the rap fashion plate unloaded his pink Range Rover on eBay and made a switch to purple — he's changed his wardrobe, repainted his Bentley and Rolls and, most importantly, named his new album *Purple Haze*, with nods to purple-syrup pioneer DJ Screw (alas, no shout-outs to Barney). And speaking of, there's also Sizzurp, the purple, grape-flavored liqueur that Cam released earlier this year. Ah, synergy.

ODDS OF BLENDER 100 APPEARANCE IN 2005: **9-1**

Cam'ron: "You there! Buy me more jewelry!"

43

THUGSPIAN!

SEAN COMBS

Surprisingly, the gaudy mogul makes his leading-man debut not in a Steven Seagal action flick but on Broadway, starring in *A Raisin in the Sun*. His acting, says the *New York Times*, makes the show "lopsided and ultimately dreary" — but since when have haters stopped Sean Combs?

42

ALT-PORN

SUICIDE GIRLS

In 2001 photographer Missy Suicide discovered her calling — photographing tattooed and/or heavily pierced goth chicks wearing very few clothes. (Hey, it beats being a blacksmith!) That calling has now become a mini-industry with its own Web site, live burlesque show and nü-porn coffee-table book.

41

POSITIVE PUNKS

GOOD CHARLOTTE

Last year, these boys shot from pop-punk nobodies to chart-owning demigods, more interested in songs about uplift than upheaval. With their own brand new label (D.C. Flag), a Warped Tour headlining spot and an album due in September, they show no signs of budging.

40

SENSITIVE METALLERS

HOOBASTANK

Guitarist Dan Estrin was almost killed in a motorcycle crash last summer, but even a fractured skull couldn't stop these California emo-metallers. Their new album is already nearing platinum certification, powered by the jewel-heist video for the lead single, "The Reason."

39

DOESN'T SUCK ANYMORE!

ROCK RADIO

Goodbye, Fred Durst; hello, skinny boys with skinnier ties

Not since Kurt Cobain hijacked the charts has commercial radio paid so much attention to under-the-radar rock — from L.A. to New York, the modern-rock format has been shunning jock-rock like limpbizkit for arty bands (Yeah Yeah Yeahs, Modest Mouse) and "alternative gold" acts (Nirvana, the Cure). One popular upstart, L.A.'s Indie 103.1, chops any band who sounds as though it paid more than $11.89 to record its album: Jet and the Strokes howl alongside vintage acts such as Television and New Order.

ODDS OF BLENDER 100 APPEARANCE IN 2005: **40-1**

38

AUDIO ADVANCE

EARPLUG HEADPHONES

Stick 'em in and rock on

IPod users know that ear buds are inconspicuous but let in too much background noise; foam earplugs block out noise, but don't let in anything fun, either. So some genius combined the two into plug-phones, such as Shure's E2c model ($99), that seal off your ear canal against distractions (like, say, oncoming trucks).

ODDS OF BLENDER 100 APPEARANCE IN 2005: **23-1**

This page: Maya Hayuk (Danger Mouse); Jonathan Kantor (iPod); Erin Patrice O'Brien/Corbis Outline (Cam'ron)
Opposite: Redferns/Retna Ltd. (Joplin); Jon Furniss/Wireimage.com (Zellweger); Frank Ockenfels 3/Corbis Outline (Pink)

Janis Joplin decorated her room with posters of her favorite artist.

37

HOLLYWOOD HEROINE

JANIS JOPLIN

Prayed for a Mercedes-Benz — got two biopics instead

Forget pirates, zombies and that Jesus guy. Thanks to a pair of planned biopics, the next hot Hollywood subject is the hard-living (and, as a result, now not living at all) singer Janis Joplin. *Piece of My Heart* has A-list acting talent in the form of Oscar winner Renée Zellweger. *The Gospel According to Janis,* meanwhile, will star Pink, who campaigned for the role in predictably restrained fashion. "She got six inches from my face," explains producer Peter Newman, "and said, 'There is no fucking person in the world who can play Janis other than me.' "

ODDS OF BLENDER 100 APPEARANCE IN 2005: 50-1

Baron Wolman/Retna Ltd.

36

R&B MILF

BRANDY

Her new album, she says, celebrates "my struggle, my pain." R&Bemo, anyone?

"I CAN LISTEN to Ashanti, Alicia Keys and even Beyoncé without feeling threatened," insists R&B princess Brandy. "And that's because I'm not insecure. Sure, those girls are great, but I have talent as well."

Now 25, Brandy has been famous for a decade, having released two multiplatinum albums, appeared in hit movies (*I Still Know What You Did Last Summer* among them) and starred in her own sitcom, *Moesha.* She's bagged a Grammy and, in the last two years alone, gotten hitched, become a mom and filed for divorce.

"I was too young to be married," she says. "I have a beautiful daughter to show for it, but it was tough. I've grown up a whole bunch recently."

Her newfound maturity, she says, is scattered all over her new album, *Afrodisiac*, like confetti: "It celebrates my womanhood, my struggle, my pain."

Your pain?

"Yeah. You know, I've had a real roller-coaster ride in this business. When you're famous from such a young age, it's difficult. Things get kind of gory. Finding a person to love you, or even finding friends, can be very difficult. You know how many real friends I've got?" She holds up a few fingers. "Three. So when I say roller-coaster ride, I mean it." *NICK DUERDEN*

ODDS OF BLENDER 100 APPEARANCE IN 2005: 13-1

"When you're famous from such a young age, it's difficult. Things get kinda gory."

PHOTOGRAPHY BY JUDSON BAKER

Dominating Season For Wallace Will End With R&R

The Beasties warn deaf people of gun-carrying moose.

35

BEST MIDLIFE CRISIS

THE BEASTIE BOYS

New York's finest white boys time-travel to hip-hop's old school

OK, so MCA's raspy rapping sounds like he's been gargling regularly with a pile of disposable razors. But otherwise, hip-hop's *other* white meats don't sound a day older than 18 on their first album since 1998's *Hello Nasty.* Packed with retro breakbeats and nonsense tag-team rhyming, *To the 5 Boroughs* is the trio's boisterous big-up to their hometown — and an impassioned up-yours to George W. Bush. The video for "Ch-check It Out" is a Spike Jonzean mix of *Star Trek* costumes and alligator attacks.

ODDS OF BLENDER 100 APPEARANCE IN 2005: **15-1**

34

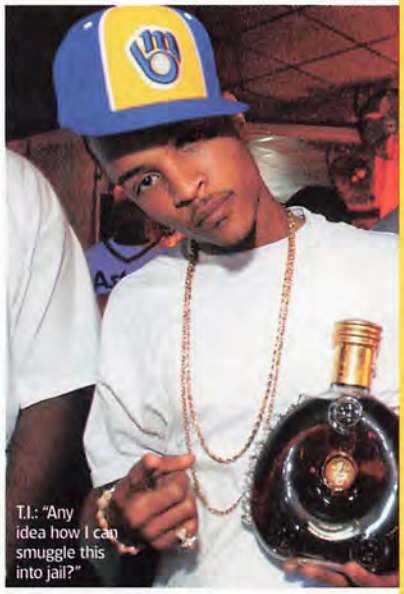
BEHIND-BARS STAR

T.I.

The Southern MC who's not just "in" — he's incarcerated!

If ex–P. Diddy protégé Shyne — locked up on gun charges after manning one hit single — can sign a $3 million label deal with Def Jam from behind bars, things aren't so grim for this Atlanta MC. His single "Rubber Band Man" was dominating radio and MTV when, in March, T.I. turned himself in to the authorities for parole violation. He's stuck in the slammer for three years, although it may be just one if he plays nice. Southern kingpin and T.I. pal David Banner is counting the minutes: "T.I. is gonna try to take over the game. And you gonna listen to him."

ODDS OF BLENDER 100 APPEARANCE IN 2005: **200-1**



T.I.: "Any idea how I can smuggle this into jail?"

33

FALLEN ANGEL

AMY LEE

Fallen, the debut album from the Lee-fronted Evanescence, has now sold 5 million copies. And the best may be yet to come. "I feel we could have gone so much further," says the biggest female rock star on the face of the planet. "I'm dying to do that on the next album."

32

JOYSTICK ALERT

HALO 2

The sequel to the best-selling alien-eviscerating action shooter doesn't come out until this fall — but it's so hyped, Justin Timberlake begged for a personal demo at Bungie studios and got his tour bus outfitted with XBoxes.

31

GANGSTA GOBLET

PIMP CUPS

Any schmo can scrounge a fur coat and velvet bowler from the local thrift-store dollar bin — true pimps pay thousands for custom-designed diamond-inset chalices. Ask Snoop, Lil Jon, R. Kelly and 50 Cent: There's nothing better for sipping on juice than an unwieldy metal goblet!

30

MUSOS' MUSOS

WILCO

Wilco's fantastically weird album *A Ghost Is Born* may be a treat for furrowed-browed musicologists, but *Blender* contributor Greg Kot's recent band biography serves as a reminder that Jeff Tweedy & Co. are also no strangers to rock & roll excess. As did Tweedy's recent spell in rehab for pill addiction.

29

APPETITE FOR COLLABORATION

JOSH HOMME

"Working" with Brody Dalle wasn't this rock stud's only liaison

There are probably only six degrees of separation between Homme, singer-guitarist for Queens of the Stone Age, and any notable hard-rocker. He's helmed 10 volumes of out-there collaborative CDs called *Desert Sessions,* enlisting PJ Harvey and members of Soundgarden; he recently wrote songs for Melissa Auf Der Maur's debut; and he plays drums in new critics' favorites Eagles of Death Metal. What's next? "I'd really like to work with Peaches," he says. "We'll make Christian polka together." Oh, you!

ODDS OF BLENDER 100 APPEARANCE IN 2005: **17-1**

28

CELEBRITY RIDE-PIMPER

XZIBIT

MTV's newest star wants to put some crunk in your trunk

Quick car quiz: Are your rims smaller than drink coasters? Does your system consist of a Walkman duct-taped to the dashboard? Is your sunroof a rusty hole in the ceiling? If the answer's yes, Xzibit is your patron saint. The host of MTV's *Pimp My Ride* shepherds would-be ballers and their dingy, dilapidated cars into chromed-out, retrofitted, PS2-in-the-headrests glory. The jalopies get some shine, and so does the Los Angeles hip-hop fixture: In between extreme automotive makeovers, X is finishing up his fifth album, *Weapons of Mass Destruction.*

ODDS OF BLENDER 100 APPEARANCE IN 2005: **40-1**

Clockwise from top left: Thomas Rabsch/Idols; Hope North/Corbis Outline; courtesy of MTV; Rick Diamond/WireImage.com

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Joss Stone has soul, really nice hair.

27

OLD AT HEART

YOUNG FOGEYS

Look like teens, sound like boomers

"Geezer-friendly music + young hot bod = oodles of moolah" is an equation record executives have grown to love. A bizarro universe mirror image of Britney, Christina, etc., this phenomenon was spearheaded by 25-year-old Norah Jones, whose *Feels Like Home* CD sold more than a million copies in its first week of release. But nipping at her sensible shoes are Joss Stone, 17, and Renee Olstead, only 15. Meanwhile, the popularity of Rat Pack–loving *American Idol*'s John Stevens proved that you don't need to hold a tune like Frank Sinatra, or at all, to get the fogey vote.

ODDS OF BLENDER 100 APPEARANCE IN 2005: 35-1

26

DISNEY DIVAS

HILARY AND HAYLIE DUFF

Power sisters get famous, "edgy"

Could the Duffs be any hotter? Only if *The Simpsons*' beer-dispensing Duff Man was their dad. Sixteen-year-old Hilary has confirmed her tween icon status with the triple-platinum *Metamorphosis* CD, plus big-screen roles in *Cheaper by the Dozen* and *A Cinderella Story.* The lead single of the *Cinderella* soundtrack featured her performing a cover of the Go-Go's' "Our Lips Are Sealed" with older sis Haylie, who cowrote tracks on *Metamorphosis* and is working on her own edgier rock album. "Edgier"? "When I'm writing for myself," she says, "I don't censor myself as much."

ODDS OF BLENDER 100 APPEARANCE IN 2005: 10-1

Hilary (left) and Haylie Duff

25

UNLIKELY CAREER MOVE

JAIL

The big house may not be the best place to drop your soap, but it is a good environment to snag a record contract. The rapper Shyne, imprisoned for assault for his role in the 1999 P. Diddy/J. Lo nightclub shooting, recently signed a deal with Def Jam Records that could be worth $3 million.

24

HONORARY WHITE STRIPE

LORETTA LYNN

On her Johnny Cash–style "comeback" album, *Van Lear Rose,* Lynn plugs in with Jack White for a heavy helping of bluesy oomph and garage-rock spunk — the most graceful country-matron second act since Dolly Parton found bluegrass.

23

THE NEW SCIENTOLOGY

KABBALAH

Scientology may "cure" dyslexia, but hot Hollywood pseudo-faith Kabbalah goes even further, working on a "cellular level" to provide its red-bracelet-wearing devotees (Madonna, Britney, Paris, Demi) . . . immortality! Top that, Hubbard!

22

HARD-KNOCK CLIP

JAY-Z'S "99 PROBLEMS"

Before he had the bling, the bubbly and Beyoncé, Jay-Z had nothing but Brooklyn. This Mark Romanek–directed video is a haunting love letter to that borough, a guerrilla run through barren projects full of pit-bull fights, sidewalk breakdancers, handgun-wielding kids and full-frontal male nudity.

21

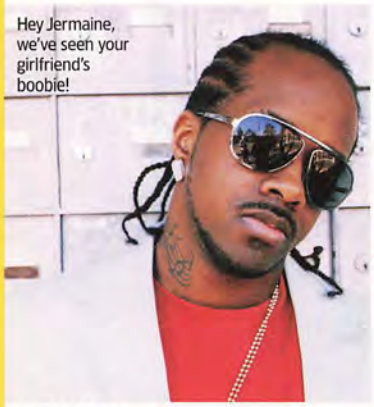
ROTUND RAPPER

BIZARRE

He's fat! He's deranged! He's Eminem's horror-loving homey

He performs wearing a shower cap and spandex. He's got big, fat man-titties and flaunts them more than Pamela Anderson (that's him in the "My Band" video hanging shirtless from the ceiling). The best D12 member without a daughter named Hailie — and the only other one you'd be able to pick out of a lineup — is rap's most likeable weirdo since Ol' Dirty Bastard.

ODDS OF BLENDER 100 APPEARANCE IN 2005: 18-1



Hey Jermaine, we've seen your girlfriend's boobie!

20

HOTLANTAN

JERMAINE DUPRI

He gets to see Janet's breast — more than once!

When Janet Jackson showed up for last month's *Blender* cover shoot, we couldn't help but be distracted from the most famous right boobie in pop by a dangling bellybutton ring that read *JD's.* As in Jermaine Dupri, the producer/label owner/former Whodini backup dancer who clearly knows how to stake his territory. Dupri launched his executive life at age 18, pimping Kris Kross's kid-rap, and has since helped spearhead the platinum-heavy careers of Jagged Edge, Bow Wow and St. Louis newbie J-Kwon. His own album, *Green Light,* is due this year.

ODDS OF BLENDER 100 APPEARANCE IN 2005: 14-1

Robert Maxwell/CPI (Stone); courtesy of W&W Public Relations (Dupri); Erica Berger/Corbis Outline (Duffs)

© 2004 ESPN, INC.

19

TEENAGE RIOT!

LINDSAY LOHAN

The *Mean Girls* heroine makes her next move: rock star!

SHE MAY HAVE just turned 18, but Lindsay Lohan's hair is already falling out. It's nearing 9 P.M. in a New York City photo studio, and two stylists are picking at the starlet's head — her extensions are "acting up." Lohan smiles even as auburn strands get yanked and rearranged behind her. Clearly, being Hollywood's hottest teen star and newest sex symbol takes work — patience doesn't hurt, either.

An edgier PG-13 to Hilary Duff's G-rated cuteness, Lohan broke through with Disney's 2003 *Freaky Friday.* Her rich, chameleon-like performance in *Mean Girls* propelled the dark comedy to a $25 million opening and shot her into the A-list. Her talents don't stop at acting: After learning guitar for *Freaky Friday,* she's contributed totally unembarrassing power pop to two of her films' soundtracks. "I want to have an album out by next summer," she says, listing influences from Jet to Madonna to Outkast. "My voice is raspy, so it's easier for me to do rock, but I'm into hip-hop, too."

Besides juggling scripts (next up is a *Love Bug* remake) and songs, Lohan has had to contend with the tabloids' sudden fascination. She's been lumped in with "out-of-control" party girls Britney Spears, Mischa Barton and pal Paris Hilton. "If I work all day," she shrugs, "I wanna have fun. I won't say we don't ever go out and have drinks — it's what you do when you're growing up." There is one rumor, however, she wants no part of: "The whole implant thing? I don't think I could ever do that — it's terrifying to me. It's silly to say I would get plastic surgery at my age. It's like, you're young, you're perky — whatever!" *JONAH WEINER*

ODDS OF BLENDER 100 APPEARANCE IN 2005: 4-1

"You're young, you're perky – whatever!"

PHOTOGRAPHY BY KENNETH WILLARDT

Set design by Donnie Meyers for de facto; styling by Lisa von Weise for de facto; makeup by Kristofer Buckle for artistsbytimothypriano.com; hair by Peter Butler for for artistsbytimothypriano.com: Black dress by McGinn; sterling silver bracelets by Gretchen Jullus. 14K gold bracelets with diamond clips by Wagner & Ko; large pendant by Liza Shirombeg at Fragments.com; vintage earrings and silver necklace with charms

No, Usher, you haven't got any dog doo on your shoe.

18

KING OF R&B

USHER

Ladies and gents, 2004's biggest pop star

Mesmerized by his boyish swagger and Jacko-worthy moves — and intrigued by his high-profile breakup with TLC's Chilli, the live-in girlfriend he cheated on — sensitive thugs and lovelorn ladies alike lifted Usher's *Confessions* CD to the number 1 slot for two months running. Call him the new New Jack hustler: His croon-crunk hybrids work in the club and the bedroom. "R&B hasn't had anyone like him since Bobby Brown," says Stephen Hill, a senior VP at BET.

ODDS OF BLENDER 100 APPEARANCE IN 2005: 2-1

17

FREEK-A-LEEK!

OUTKAST

Atlanta's proudest sons branch out into Hollywood and . . . day care?

Just months after Outkast's historic Best Album Grammy win, André 3000 is clearing a spot in his trophy case for . . . an Oscar? The dapper MC has packed his purple boas and latex turbans for Hollywood: He's filming *Be Cool,* a mob comedy with John Travolta and Uma Thurman, will star as Jimi Hendrix in a planned Hughes brothers biopic and has signed on for the lead in a race-driven love story. Aside from launching pal Sleepy Brown's career, family man Big Boi is spending time at home, playing with his kids and changing some stank Huggies.

ODDS OF BLENDER 100 APPEARANCE IN 2005: 3-2

Outkast, pictured before their surgical separation

16

ADDICTION DU JOUR

PAINKILLERS

The Cinderella of narcotics, prescription painkillers such as OxyContin have been rescued from the unglamorous world of migraines and menstrual cramps thanks to the superstar patronage of Courtney Love, Kelly Osbourne and Wilco's Jeff Tweedy.

15

RETURN TO AWESOMENESS

MADONNA'S WORLD TOUR

When Madge last took to the stage in 2001, she skimped on vintage hits for late-career techno. Not so this summer, as she has promised to dig deep into her catalog on this national tour. Material Girl superfan Britney Spears tells *Blender* she's most looking forward to seeing "Ray of Light."

14

FIGHT FOR YOUR RIGHTS

ELECTION-YEAR ACTIVISM

With the 2004 presidential election approaching, Ludacris, Modest Mouse, the Dixie Chicks and many others are helping to register young voters at shows and online, while partisan groups like Concerts for Kerry and the GOP-owned "Reggie" tour bus target like-minded twentysomethings.

13

MEAN BOYS SUCK

AVRIL LAVIGNE

The mall-punk champion has just released the scathing breakup album *Under My Skin,* her follow-up to the 14 million–selling *Let Go.* The lead single, "Don't Tell Me," is the perfect track with which to ice a grabby boyfriend.

12

MOPEY THROWBACK!

LATE-'80S ALTERNA-POP

Pixies, Cure, Morrissey strike again

One sure way to slow the aging process is to see the bands you got high to in college 15 years ago. So the mainstays of college radio, circa 1989, are hitting the road this summer. The famously combative Pixies have buried the hatchet for a tour, the Cure are blowing up festivals with oldies-heavy set lists and even Morrissey is dragging his celibate ass back into circulation. Just don't count on a Smiths reunion: Moz has declared that "it really is destroyed."

ODDS OF BLENDER 100 APPEARANCE IN 2005: 500-1

11

HOTIZZLE SHIZZLE

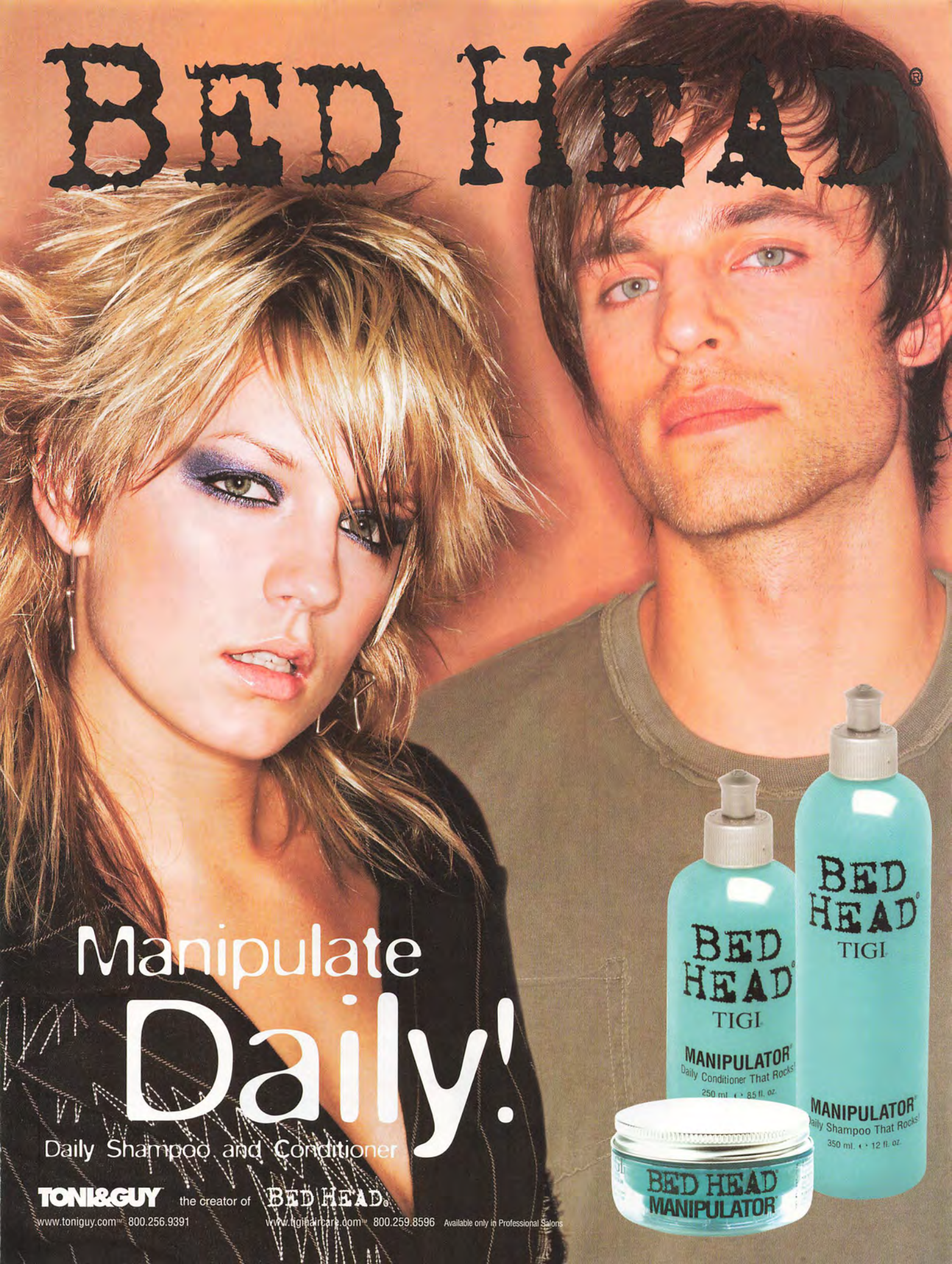
SNOOP DOGG

Hip-hop's funniest actor gets back behind the mic

From stealing scenes in *Starsky & Hutch* and *Soul Plane* to stealing shows on tour with Korn and Linkin Park this summer, Calvin Broadus does what Ice-T and Will Smith can't — goes Hollywood and stays 'hood. Out now: the debut from 213, his Long Beach supergroup with Nate Dogg and Warren G. Next: A big-budget, major-label solo album. Oh, right, and he still had time to host his own *Girls Gone Wild* DVD.

ODDS OF BLENDER 100 APPEARANCE IN 2005: 3-1

Clockwise from top left: Ben Watts/Corbis Outline; Kevin Estrada/Retna Ltd.; Anthony Mandler/Corbis Outline; F. Scott Schafer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10

MEAN GIRL

PARIS HILTON

You've seen her snot it up on Fox and sex it up on your PC — now, Paris wants to be on your iPod!

AS IF TORTURING one American family weren't enough, Hilton is spending this summer looking down her nose at the entire nation — one state at a time — on Fox's *The Simple Life 2: Road Trip.* What's next for the rich girl who's conquered prime-time TV and Internet-porn downloads? A pop career, of course! She's hard at work with JC Chasez producer Robb Boldt on a late-summer album. Check out the lead single, "Screwed," a sunny pop-rock love song that surprisingly contains no references to the hardships of carrying heavy shopping bags between Rodeo Drive boutiques.

ODDS OF BLENDER 100 APPEARANCE IN 2005: 7-1

Antoine Verglas/Corbis Outline

Call 555-7718 to order your own Paris Hilton chest muff . . . .

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ESSENCE

Lil Jon clutches his huge, bulbous . . . pimp cup.

9

LIL JON

Hits! Energy drinks! Porno! All in a day's work for the Dirty South's new hero

LIL JON HAS one vicious hangover. "I was up partying until 9 A.M.," he croaks, padding slowly through his hotel lobby in a 95-degree early-afternoon blaze. It's so humid here in Jamaica's Montego Bay that the air sits on your skin like a damp bathrobe. Helmeted under shoulder-length dreadlocks and swallowed in an oversize black T-shirt, Jon seems about as comfortable as a sheepdog locked in a sweltering car. He rubs his temple and manages a grin, flashing a gnarled lattice of gold and ice: "I don't feel crunk, man."

KING OF CRUNK!

Lil Jon not feeling crunk is like water not feeling wet. The 30-year-old MC and producer has made crunk — Southern slang for a state of lung-busting, club-closing exuberance and the bass-heavy music that promotes it — his raison d'être. In songs and videos, he's like hip-hop's Macho Man Randy Savage: mouth perpetually open in a howl, hair flung madly, voice a gravelly bellow. His mission statement is simple — partying, rowdiness and . . . did we mention partying?

He has reason to celebrate: The past year has been the wildest of Lil Jon's life. After clunking in at a modest number 56 on the pop charts, Lil Jon and the Eastside Boyz's fourth album, *Kings of Crunk*, soldiered on to sell more than 2 million copies. Comedy Central's Dave Chappelle turned Jon's guttural vocal signatures — "Yeaaah!" "What!?" and "Okaaay!" — into this year's most unavoidable dorm-room impression. ("Dave does me pretty good," Jon chuckles. "I'd like to get him on my next album.") And his chart-topping beat and screaming hook for Usher's "Yeah!" have made him the most visible R&B producer since Pharrell. "I got a check with four zeroes in it for that song," he says, smiling. "The big check with all the royalties won't come until next year."

> "You gotta go to the club, see what people are doing, find new ways of making girls dance."

Today, though, we're privy to a quieter Lil Jon — and it's only partly due to his Hennessy shell-shock. "The wild dude y'all see on TV? That's Lil Jon the star," says Jermaine Dupri, the rap impresario who gave Jon his first biz job as an A&R man at So So Def Recordings. "In real life, it's a much calmer situation: He's a working man, putting things together."

To wit, Jon has released a high-energy performance drink (named, if you couldn't guess, Crunk!!!), partnered with Oakley for special-edition sunglasses, trademarked the word *crunk* and — oh, yeah — produced and hosted a DVD called *Lil Jon and the Eastside Boyz: American Sex Series*. "I made the first crunk porno," he notes.

★ ★ ★ ★ ★

ELEVEN YEARS AGO, Jonathan Smith had just graduated from Frederick Douglass High School, a skater kid who listened to the Dead Kennedys and Public Image Ltd. "I grew up in the same 'hood Outkast comes from, Southwest Atlanta. It's like upper-middle-class for black people." His father "welded shit" at Lockheed Martin, and his mother was a nurse and National Reservist. "She just got called to active duty because of Iraq," Jon says. "Went through basic training, learned how to use guns — she's tough."

In 1993, he saw his friend Emperor Searcy DJ at a house party. Something clicked: "He went off to the navy, I learned how to spin, and when he came back I was playing the hottest clubs in Atlanta." Jon came to the attention of Dupri, who hired him for his keen ear. "My salary back then was $25,000 a year," Jon mock-shudders, bugging his eyes.

He made the jump into performing in 1997, assembling a trio with friends Lil Bo and Big Sam. They quickly became Dirty South luminaries, infamous for concerts that played more like Royal Rumbles: "We played this Louisiana club a couple years ago. It held only 500 people, but there were about 1,500 jammed in there. We doin' our songs, they goin' bananas and a fight breaks out. Four cops were there, and people started fighting the police, so they started spraying Mace. We kept right on performing — if somebody gets knocked the fuck out, that's a good concert!"

Lil Jon's word to the wise: Approach the studio as though it's a dance-floor brawl. "We pack into the booth and all get on one mic, pushing and shoving, elbowing like we really in the club. I come out soaking wet." To maintain that energy on record, Jon needs a daily club injection: "You gotta go to the club, see what people are doing, find new ways of making girls dance."

Lil Jon's biggest fear is that he'll become a one-trick pony, an iced-out flash in the pan doomed to go the way of "Where's the beef?" "I'm going into the new album like, 'Damn! What the hell am I gonna make up now?' " He's got two tricks up his sleeve, though. The first: "Crunk-rock. I'm teaming up with Korn to do a track, and Rick Rubin wants to work with me. I'd love to hook up with Linkin Park." The second is his son, Nathan, of whom he has custody: "He's 6, already plays piano — I want him to start making beats by 10. He'll be the beatmaker; I'll be his manager."

Right this moment, though, there are more pressing matters at hand. Lil Jon has a concert tonight, and he's dangerously uncrunk. Hunched over in his chair, he turns to *Blender* and smiles. "I gotta go sleep that liquor off." *JONAH WEINER*

ODDS OF BLENDER 100 APPEARANCE IN 2005: 12-1

PHOTOGRAPHY BY JUDSON BAKER

From top: Tony Duran/Icon International; Alphonse Telymonde

Jessica Simpson: "So where *is* this damn chicken of the sea?"

8

NEWLYWED KNOCKOUT

JESSICA SIMPSON

America's favorite ex-virgin can't be stopped

Hit TV shows. Hit records. Marital sex. Is there anything Jessica Simpson can't do (except tell the difference between chicken and tuna)? Apparently not. She's in the lead for the coveted role of Daisy Duke in the movie remake of *The Dukes of Hazzard* and, with hubby Nick Lachey, is pitching a book about how to have a happy marriage. "We are not scholars on relationships," she says, "but I think we're definitely in a groove." Wait, does that mean there's something they *are* scholars on?

ODDS OF BLENDER 100 APPEARANCE IN 2005: 8-1

7

TECH REVOLUTION

APPLE COMPUTER

Silicon Valley saves the music biz

Robbie Williams says his iPod is "amazing." Moby claims he "can't imagine music any other way." Chris Rock has two of them. You can even turn it into a tiny FM radio station with a $35 iTrip Transmitter, or record on it with a $35 mic. Beyond the 3 million iPods that have fattened its coffers, though, Apple's been working overtime for music lovers. The iTunes Music Store sold 70 million downloads in its first year, recently added weekly freebies and has started to feature out-of-print rarities like early Motown singles. GarageBand, Apple's music-recording software, hasn't yielded any hits yet, but just wait until they roll out the iGroupie feature.

ODDS OF BLENDER 100 APPEARANCE IN 2005: 7-1

6

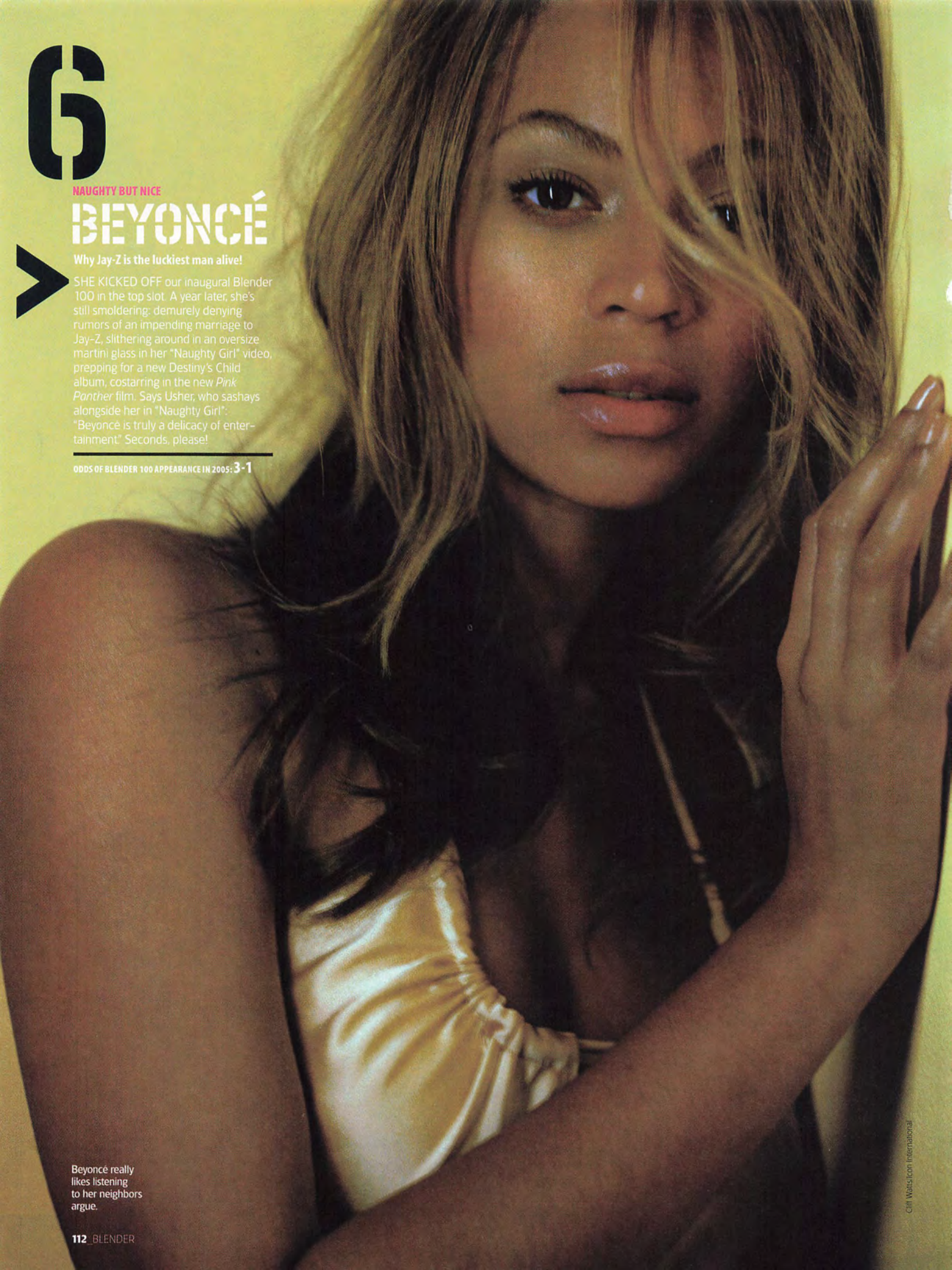
NAUGHTY BUT NICE

BEYONCÉ

Why Jay-Z is the luckiest man alive!

SHE KICKED OFF our inaugural Blender 100 in the top slot. A year later, she's still smoldering: demurely denying rumors of an impending marriage to Jay-Z, slithering around in an oversize martini glass in her "Naughty Girl" video, prepping for a new Destiny's Child album, costarring in the new *Pink Panther* film. Says Usher, who sashays alongside her in "Naughty Girl": "Beyoncé is truly a delicacy of entertainment." Seconds, please!

ODDS OF BLENDER 100 APPEARANCE IN 2005: 3-1



Beyoncé really likes listening to her neighbors argue.

Cliff Watts/Icon International

5

PREP-HOOP HOORAY!

KANYE WEST

How a Chicago backpacker became a hip-hop mastermind

Forget Pharrell and Dr. Dre: Kanye West is hip-hop's new double trouble, producing essential songs by Jay-Z, Brandy and others, and then picking up the mic and recording the year's best hip-hop album. Even West knows the shift was unlikely: "I don't look like a rapper, I don't have the best voice, and I definitely didn't have the biggest push behind me."

ODDS OF BLENDER 100 APPEARANCE IN 2005: **6-1**

4

JACK OF ALL TRADES

JACK WHITE

Retro rock's reigning genius punches up enemies, jump-starts Loretta Lynn's career

Since the release of the White Stripes' Grammy-winning *Elephant* last year, Jack White has been busy showing off his skills at soundtrack writing (*Cold Mountain*), acting (*Coffee and Cigarettes*) and beating the crap out of the lead singer of the Von Bondies. If that wasn't enough, he found time to produce *Van Lear Rose*, only the second album in 15 years from country icon Loretta Lynn. "I see little old Jack becoming one of the greatest producers there is," says the famously bullshit-free 70-year-old.

ODDS OF BLENDER 100 APPEARANCE IN 2005: **7-5**

Gwen Stefani: Ready for her cameo in *Attack of the Giant Jewelry Spiders*

3

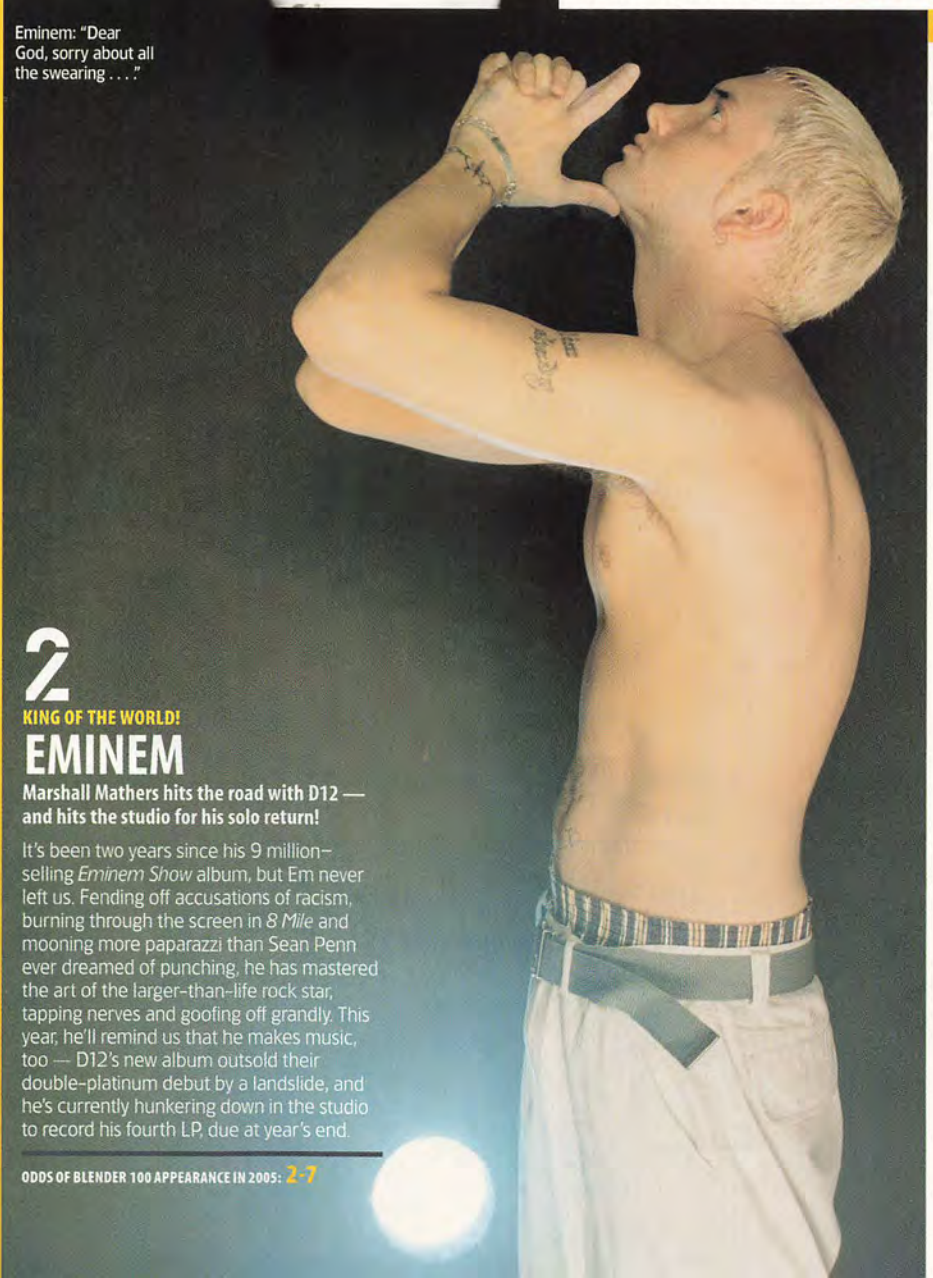
FLYING SOLO

GWEN STEFANI

The No Doubt princess trades in her homies for Outkast and Martin Scorsese

Sure, everyone loves No Doubt's wacky mohawked drummer. But who hasn't wondered when Gwen Stefani would give her band chums a vacation and emerge as the genre-melding megastar God intended her to be? Wonder no more! This November, catch her as '30s Hollywood starlet Jean Harlow in Martin Scorsese's Howard Hughes biopic *The Aviator*. Meanwhile, for her as-yet-untitled debut solo album, Stefani hired a hit-making dream team: Dallas Austin, Linda Perry, Tim Armstrong, the Matrix, Missy Elliott, André 3000 and (pause to catch breath) the Neptunes. Call her Pink Plus.

ODDS OF BLENDER 100 APPEARANCE IN 2005: **EVEN**



Eminem: "Dear God, sorry about all the swearing . . ."

2

KING OF THE WORLD!

EMINEM

Marshall Mathers hits the road with D12 — and hits the studio for his solo return!

It's been two years since his 9 million-selling *Eminem Show* album, but Em never left us. Fending off accusations of racism, burning through the screen in *8 Mile* and mooning more paparazzi than Sean Penn ever dreamed of punching, he has mastered the art of the larger-than-life rock star, tapping nerves and goofing off grandly. This year, he'll remind us that he makes music, too — D12's new album outsold their double-platinum debut by a landslide, and he's currently hunkering down in the studio to record his fourth LP, due at year's end.

ODDS OF BLENDER 100 APPEARANCE IN 2005: **2-7**

Clockwise from top left: Lego; Richard Stefani/Corbis Outline; Jason Bell/Camera Press/Retna Ltd.; WENN/Newscom

THE BLENDER 100 #1

DAVE CHAPPELLE'S WILD RIDE

BY ROB TANNENBAUM ★ PHOTOGRAPHY BY F. SCOTT SCHAFER

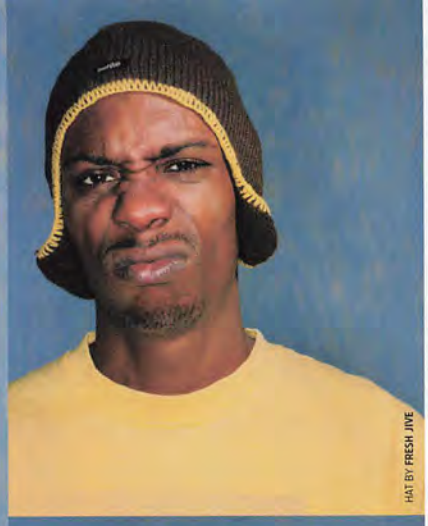
→ HOW DID DAVE CHAPPELLE TOP THE BLENDER 100 WITHOUT ACTUALLY BEING A MUSICIAN? BY POKING FUN AT EVERYONE FROM R. KELLY TO P. DIDDY TO RICK JAMES. BLENDER SITS DOWN WITH COMEDY'S REIGNING ROCK STAR TO TALK RACE, POLITICS AND, OF COURSE, WHY HE WANTS TO BOTOX HIS BALLS

Dave Chappelle: His other car is a Porsche.

"FLY-PACAT" BUTTERFLY GO-CART BY **KENNY BROWNING**. HAT BY **HUGO BOSS**

Dave's *Spider-Man 2* audition: "Next!"

CUSTOMIZED T-SHIRT BY **DEBORAH FERGUSON**. HAT BY **HUGO BOSS**



HAT BY **FRESH JIVE**

HAT BY **RARE JEANS**

HAT BY **HUGO BOSS**

THERE ARE A FEW million people who love *Chappelle's Show*. Right now, Dave Chappelle isn't one of them.

"The show is ruining my fucking life," Chappelle tells an unruly Friday night crowd at the Improv in Houston. Like all his jokes, this draws roaring laughs from the racially mixed crowd. But for Chappelle, stardom after 16 years of standup comedy has trapped him in calls for repetition, like an old-school rapper trying to introduce new songs to an audience that wants only familiar hits.

In its second season this year, Comedy Central's *Chappelle's Show* averaged more than 3 million viewers per episode, an increase of over 50 percent from season one. The funniest man on television — a married father of two who lives in Yellow Springs, Ohio, a town without a comedy club — was an unlikely crossover hit.

Chappelle, 30, was always a cult act: He had walk-ons in *Robin Hood: Men in Tights* and *Con Air*, and fronted the short-lived 1996 network series *Buddies*, which won't appear on Trio's *Brilliant but Canceled* anytime soon. *Half-Baked*, the 1997 stoner comedy he cowrote and starred in, was about as funny as the munchies.

With his innocent Bugs Bunny overbite and stick-figure frame, Chappelle has done two seasons of outrageous sketches, often about racial conflict and hypocrisy in America, masking the audacious sting with what one critic called "a kind of laid-back indignation." He has addressed charges that R. Kelly sexually abused a teen (a mock video called "Pee on You"), done a skit about a white family inconveniently named the Niggars, saluted the limited vocabulary of Lil Jon (*"Whaat?" "Yeeaah!" "Oh-kaay!"*) and re-created Rick James's days as a cokehead antagonist.

Tonight, Chappelle confronts Houston with provocative wisecracks about Michael Jackson, Whitney Houston and R. Kelly ("If a man can't pee on his fans, I don't wanna be in show business"), and vows to Botox his testicles "to get the wrinkles out." Several boozed-up hecklers call for him to do Tyrone, the crack addict he's portrayed on *Chappelle's Show* several times. "I'm not doing Tyrone," he announces. The crowd boos.

"THE SHOW IS RUINING MY LIFE."

Later this summer, a new Chappelle comedy special, with some of this new material, will air on Showtime, and he's in talks to make a music-and-comedy concert film with *Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind* director Michel Gondry. As he sits down with *Blender* over coffee and cigarettes, he wonders whether the success of the show might compel him to quit after two seasons. →

Styling: Deborah Ferguson for RougeArtists.com; hair: Andre Lewis; grooming: Sandy Perrault. This page: F. Scott Schafer (4)

stpauligirl.com

Never bitter.

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↑ At Madison Square Garden with Q-Tip (top left), Jay-Z

How soon after the broadcast of the Rick James skit did someone come up to you and yell, "I'm Rick James, bitch!"?
Twelve hours! [*Laughs*] The show airs on Wednesday night, and the next morning I went outside to get coffee. From my front door to the coffee shop: "I'm Rick James, bitch!" "I'm Rick James, bitch!" I've been hearing it ever since.

You say onstage that the TV show is ruining your life. That's obviously a joke, but —
There's truth in it, absolutely. Sometimes the popularity of something ruins it. It's one of the things I've thrown on the scales as I'm deciding if I'm going to do the show again. Everyone says, "It's a no-brainer; they're giving you all this money." Yeah, but money is not why the show worked. The show worked because we acted like nobody was watching. And now, everybody's watching.

Wait, you're thinking of ending the show after two seasons?
It's crossed my mind, absolutely. The show is so good, I'd hate for it to ever be bad. And scrutiny might ruin it. I'm looking at what Howard Stern's going through, and it would be hard to do my show with those boundaries put on me.

Is this just a negotiating tactic to squeeze more money out of Comedy Central?
Nah, I don't need those kinds of tactics. For them, my show is like *Friends*.

People in the crowd at your show last night were yelling for you to do Tyrone, the crack addict. Why not just do it and make them happy?
It's hard on the throat. And another thing: I don't like people telling me what to do [*laughs*]. I got funnier shit. So if you shut up, I might have four or five things better than Tyrone. I've got some jokes that I'm working on, real detailed pieces. And other jokes about having my balls Botoxed. Smart humor, dirty humor — both are funny to me.

All right, we give up. What does "Skeet! Skeet!" mean?
Should I break the code of silence? How do I say this without grossing out your readers? "Skeet! Skeet!" has something to do with spreading your genetics on somebody.

Speaking of which, tell us about meeting R. Kelly.
The week that the "Pee on You" sketch came out, I went to see the rapper Common in L.A., and R. Kelly was there. Some of the dudes around him were mad on his behalf, and they approached me a little rough.

Were you worried? His posse was probably bigger than yours.
That never worries me. It's all about love in the room: People in this room love *you*, and people in this room love *me*. You got a lot of people with you, I got some people with me.

There's R. Kelly, Michael Jackson, Janet Jackson, Kobe Bryant. Do you ever feel like you're living in a Golden Age of black celebrity misbehavior?
Before R. Kelly ever peed on people, Chuck Berry was shitting on people. And none of these people are guilty until proven guilty. For instance, when the most recent allegations came out about Michael Jackson, I was doing some Comedy Central awards thing. I thought it was strange that almost every journalist who was on the red carpet asked me for a Michael Jackson joke. They didn't say that shit when priests were fucking kids! But now, all of a sudden, fucking a kid is hilarious?

It's funny because a black man did it?
Yeah, a rich, freaky black dude. The public really enjoys the downfall of celebrities too much.

More so with black celebrities than white?
If Brad Pitt was in this kind of trouble, I don't think they'd have as much fun with it. These Michael Jackson jokes that I do in my act now — first time in my career I've done Michael jokes. I always felt bad for the guy. Whenever a black person's →

"I'M RICK JAMES, BITCH!"

The finest musically minded sketches from *Chappelle's Show*

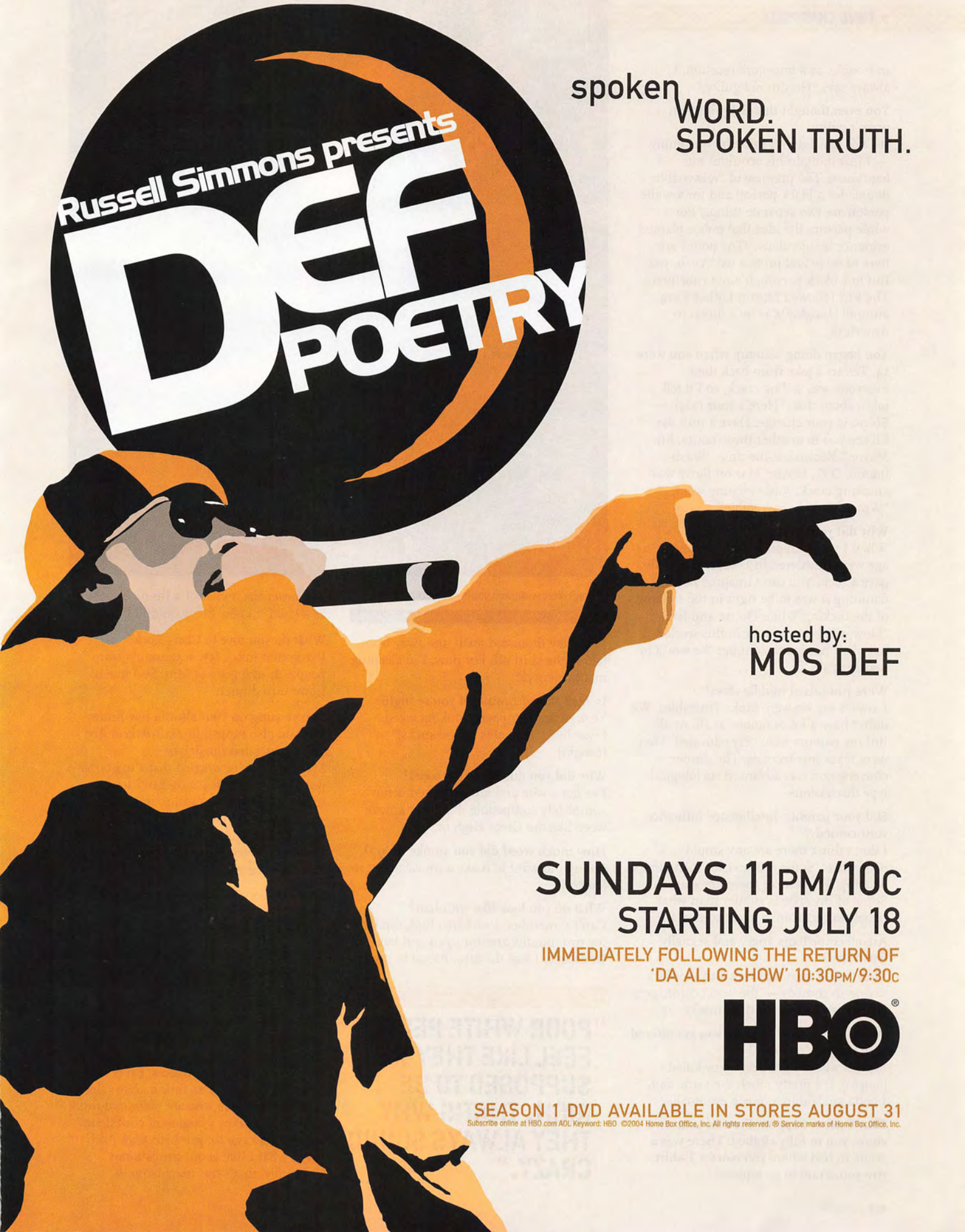
"MAKING DA BAND 2"
In this spoof of the MTV show, a P. Diddy–impersonating Chappelle orders his musical protégés out on ever more nutty quests, from photographing midgets to securing Cambodian breast milk.
Catchphrase: "I only drink the finest breast milks!"

"CHARLIE MURPHY'S TRUE HOLLYWOOD STORIES #1: RICK JAMES"
Show cast member (and brother-of-Eddie) Murphy recalls a series of '80s-era encounters with coke-crazed superfreak Rick James. Chappelle plays the funk icon and convicted woman-beater in a suitably berserk manner.
Catchphrase: "I'm Rick James, bitch!"

"PEE ON YOU"
An R. Kelly video spoof that finds Chappelle's R&B loverman expressing his desire to urinate on women — and actually hosing down a trio of them from a pipe connected to a vat of his own excreta.
Catchphrase: "The only thing that will make my life complete/ Is when I turn your face into a toilet seat."

"A MOMENT IN THE LIFE OF LIL JON"
In a recurring series of skits, Chappelle plays the dreadlocked rapper as a man who can communicate only through repetitive crunk screams or equally hilarious ruminative eloquence.
Catchphrase: A tie among *"Whaat?"*, *"Yeeaah!"* and *"Oh-kaay!"* CLARK COLLIS

From top: NBAE/Getty Images; F. Scott Schafer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in trouble, as a knee-jerk reaction, I always say, "They're not guilty."

You even thought that O.J. Simpson wasn't guilty.
It's not that I didn't think he was guilty — I just thought his acquittal was legitimate. The premise of "reasonable doubt" for a black person and for a white person are two separate things. For a white person, the idea that police planted evidence is ridiculous: "The police are here to serve and protect us!" Yeah, *you*. But to a black person, it's not ridiculous. The FBI followed Martin Luther King around! [*Laughs*] Was he a threat to America?

You began doing standup when you were 14. Tell us a joke from back then.
Everyone was selling crack, so I'd tell jokes about that: "Here's your crack — $6.99 is your change. Have a nice day. I'll see you in another three hours, Mr. Mayor." Because at the time, [Washington, D.C., mayor] Marion Barry was smoking crack. And everyone went, "Wow, this kid's incredible!"

Why did you want to be famous?
When I was in high school, 555 people my age were murdered in D.C., and nobody gave a fuck. You can't imagine how daunting it was to be right in the shadow of the fucking White House and feel, "How will I ever matter in this world?" I felt like I needed to conquer the world to matter at all.

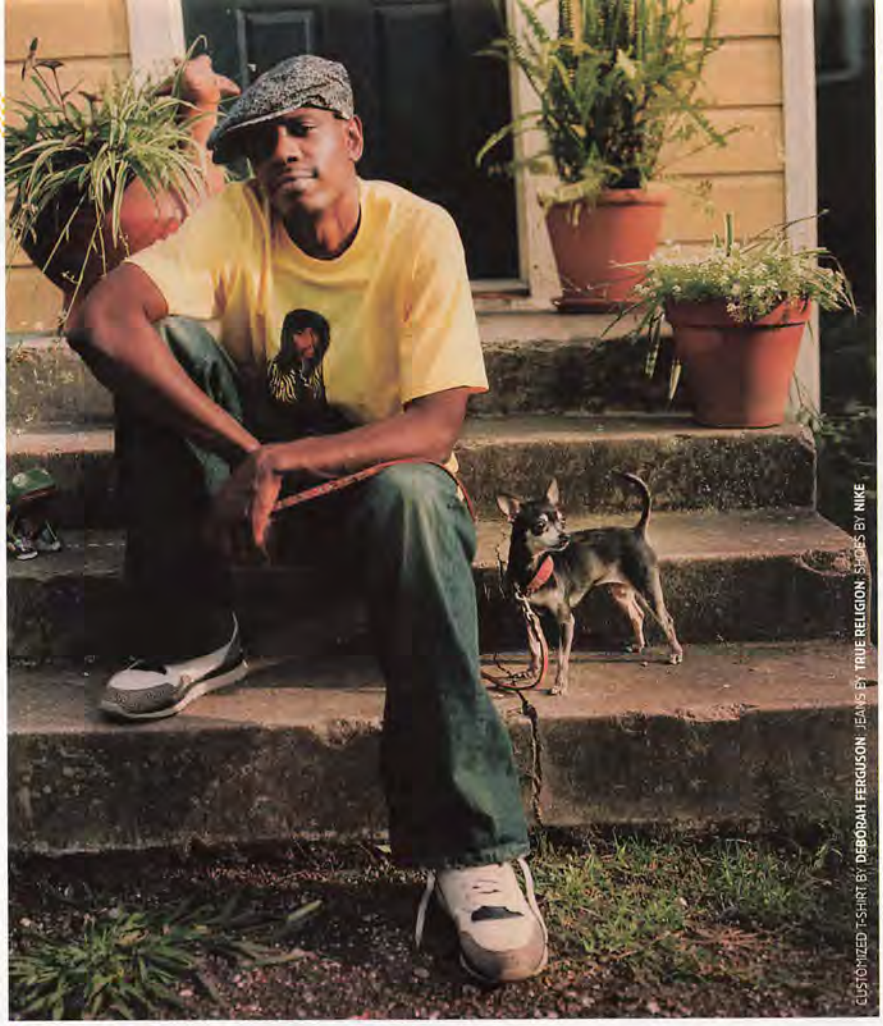
Were you raised middle-class?
I always say we were broke Huxtables. We didn't have a lot of money at all. At *all*. But my parents were very educated. They were black intellectuals. The dinner conversation was advanced sociological-type discussions.

Did your parents' intelligence influence your comedy?
I don't think there are any stupid comedians. Some are smarter than others [*laughs*]. But none of them are stupid. Some of my style is subtler than what people expect from a black comedian.

Are all comedians angry and sexually frustrated?
They might start that way. But there's a saying in comedy — the worst comic gets laid more than the best plumber.

What kind of film roles do you get offered now that you're a star?
Movies where I get beat up or killed [*laughs*]. It's pretty much the same shit. I gotta get laid in a movie eventually.

That'll never happen. Even in your own show, you're fully clothed. There was a scene in bed where you wore a T-shirt. Are you afraid to go topless?



↑ Never order your guard dog from a catalog.

I'm a few thousand push-ups away from taking the shirt off. For now, I'm sleeping in a turtleneck.

Is *Half-Baked* funnier if you're high?
Yeah. After I stopped smoking weed, I was like, "Hey, this movie sucks!" [*Laughs*]

Why did you quit smoking weed?
I've got a wife and kids, so weed is not completely compatible. I'll never smoke weed like the Great High of '97.

How much weed did you smoke in '97?
Enough to want to make a movie about it [*laughs*].

What do you look like with hair?
Can't remember. I rocked a high-top fade for two months around 1990 and hated it. Of course, I had the afro. Proud to say I was never the owner of a Jheri curl. Even as a child, I knew that wouldn't last.

"POOR WHITE PEOPLE FEEL LIKE THEY'RE SUPPOSED TO BE RICH. THAT'S WHY THEY ALWAYS SOUND CRAZY."

What do you owe to Chris Rock?
I've gotten into a few restaurants from people thinking I was him. So I guess I owe him dinner.

You've sung on your show a few times, and you also rapped in *Half-Baked*. Are you a frustrated musician?
Maybe. If you're worried that I'm gonna put a record out, fear not. But I love music. When we're putting music in the show and I go to the studio, I know what I want pretty quick. I'm good with music. It's easier to write a funny song than it is to write a funny joke.

So if someone offered you a record deal —
It'd be a big mistake [*laughs*].

You've had De La Soul on *Chappelle's Show*, and Mos Def. Do you also like gangsta rap?
A comic I know named Warren Thomas used to say it's black people's Tony Robbins. You listen to that shit, it motivates you. I like listening to Jay-Z talk about how much money he makes. Every time I'm in a meeting, I'm sitting across the table from people who are older and more educated. It takes a degree of confidence and inflated ego to deal with that. And that's what I like about gangsta rap. Culturally, that's our machismo. →

F. Scott Schafer

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In *Robin Hood: Men in Tights* (tights not pictured)

Sometimes people refer to you as a "hip-hop comic." Is that fair?
I'll take that. The show seems real black in contrast to what's on television. But it's all-inclusive, as far as I'm concerned. When we tour in the South, white people come up to me and say, "I watch your show every week, even though I'm a dumb white guy and you don't want me to watch." It's like, "Whoa! Take it easy." First of all, let *me* come to the conclusion that you're a dumb white guy. I appreciate the heads-up, but let me figure that out.

Do a lot of them come up to you and repeat your use of the *n* word?
Oh, yeah. All the time. It means they just want to be accepted by me. So I don't get mad at them. Sometimes I'll even give them a little lesson.

What do you say?
"You're not supposed to say that to me. You're supposed to say that *about* me as I leave, motherfucker. Don't say it in my face; I don't like that." And they'll laugh, or they'll be all freaked out. Anything I say now carries so much weight, because people put me on this pedestal. It's interesting what I'm seeing now — I get to see the best in people and the worst in people. It's crazy.

And all because you talk about race, this country's great unspoken topic.
It's hilariously unspoken. The country was founded on it. And we have this terrible hypocrisy, this unwillingness to even want to deal with it. In some kind of cosmic sense, it's hilarious. There'll be racial jokes to tell long after I'm gone.

You know who also goes through it, and no one talks about? Poor white people. Poor white people feel like they're supposed to be rich. That's why they always sound crazy — like, "Niggers are taking all the jobs at Burger King." All right, you sound like a fucking idiot right now. But everyone's fed this idea that if you don't make it here, then there's something wrong with you. And the numbers just don't add up — not everybody can make it.

Who are you going to vote for for president this fall?
I'm going to ask you to take a wild guess.

Then we'd guess John Kerry.
I'm leaning that way. Ralph Nader, I don't know what the fuck he thinks he's doing. He has slavery reparations on his platform, which makes me think he's not serious. If he thought he could win, he wouldn't even say that. After 9/11, I miss what we used to be. And I don't know if Kerry or anybody else could take us back.

It would take a long time.
It doesn't have to, though. We're the greatest nation in the world, by default. We could actually be a great nation if we weren't such pussies. We debate about whether we should apologize for the abuse of Iraqi prisoners. If you want to be great, acknowledge your mistakes. That's the example the world needs right now.

In your act, you say "I'm not gonna talk about the war," and then you do.
They understand it's not something I'm a fan of. There's shit I want to say, but people aren't ready to hear it. We're intoxicated with this dread, and fears are what breed racism. We're being brave about the wrong shit. When the insurgents first threatened Americans in Iraq, the president was like, "Bring it on." That's not the kind of bravery I admire. Even if you've given someone an ass-whupping, there should be a degree of humility in it.

A lot of your jokes come from watching television, which you don't seem to like very much.
Culturally, we've seen better days. I was watching a show about who the ugliest celebrities are. It made me feel bad. One, because I'm a celebrity. Two, because I'm not that good-looking. I have a fear of making the list.

But that's what our culture has become. On one hand, who's the ugliest celebrity, and on another network there's a show where people get plastic surgery to look like famous people. This culture is dumb. The fact that Arnold Schwarzenegger is a governor — people voted for the nigger because he's the Terminator: "Bring the budget down, Terminator!"

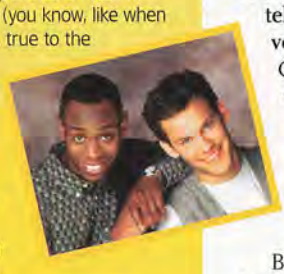
Is it strange to work for 16 years and only now to have people discover you?
I definitely took the long way around. There's a scenario where I would have been heard about before now. If I had done that scenario, I wouldn't be as happy as I am right now.

Eminem has said that if he were black, he'd be only half as successful. If you were white, would you be twice as big?
If I were white, I'd be 10 times more famous. And I would be considered the biggest racist ever. [BLENDER]

NO LAUGHING MATTER

Even a comedy genius has to pay his dues. And Dave Chappelle paid plenty in these humor-free gobblers

UNFUNNY FILM SPOOF
ROBIN HOOD: MEN IN TIGHTS *(1993)*
The exact point at which director Mel Brooks's films stopped being funny in any way whatsoever. This weary spoof of *Robin Hood: Prince of Thieves* starred Cary Elwes as the bow-and-arrowing hero and Chappelle as a Muslim sidekick named Ahchoo (you know, like when you sneeze!). In fairness, true to the title, tights-wearing is involved.



UNFUNNY MIXED-RACE SITCOM
BUDDIES *(1996)* >>>
Who would want to see a prime-time *Home Improvement* spin-off in which Chappelle is best friends with a white guy, even though their respective parents are racists? Answer: no one! *Buddies*, which the comedian later called "a disaster," ran for just four mirthless episodes before being put out of our misery.

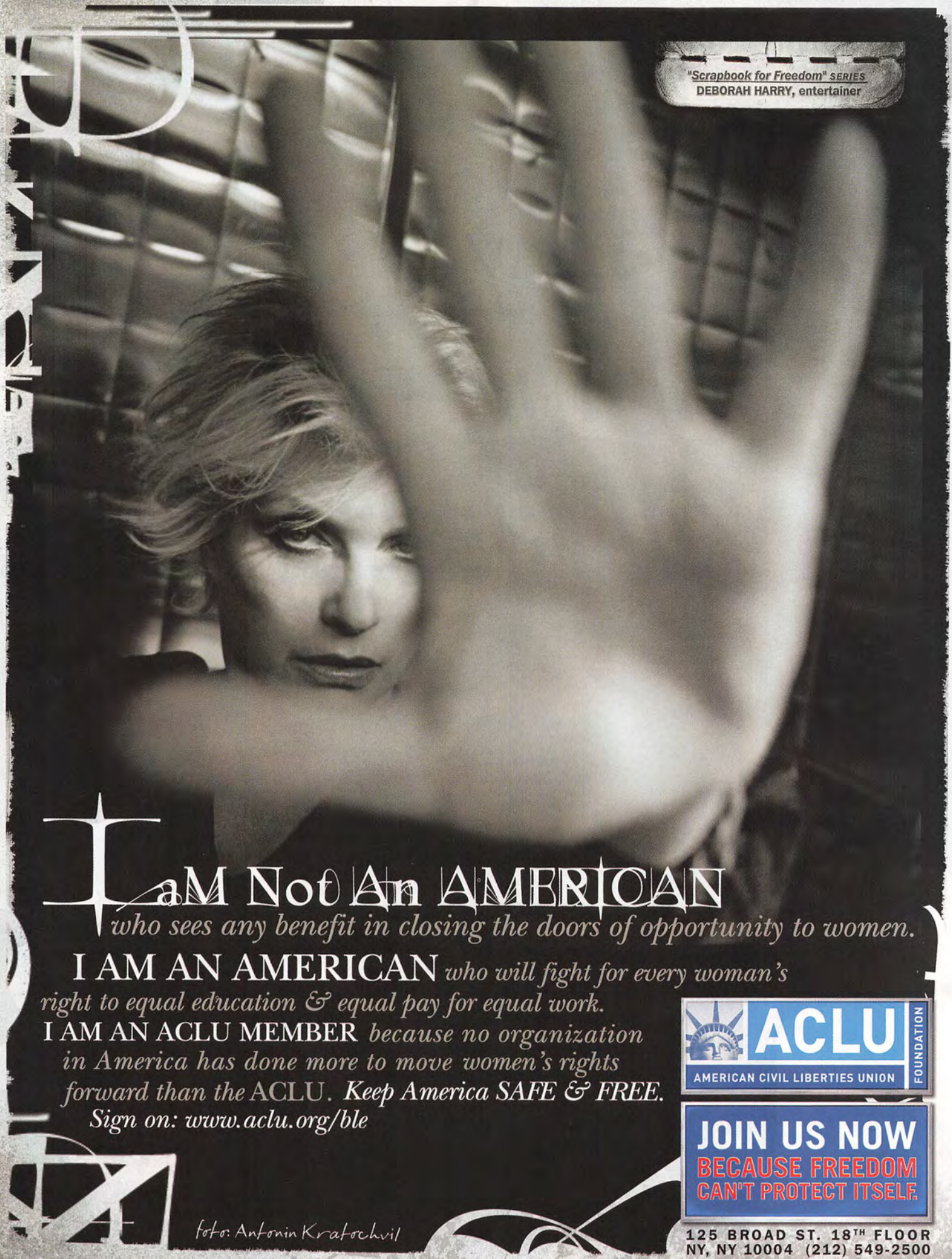
UNFUNNY COCKROACH MOVIE
JOE'S APARTMENT *(1996)*
Hilarity fails to ensue when Jerry O'Connell discovers that he must share his cheap apartment with 30,000 singing cockroaches, one of which is voiced by a presumably hard-up-for-rent-money Chappelle.

UNFUNNY CAMEOFEST
<<< 200 CIGARETTES *(1999)*
The combined talents of Ben Affleck, Kate Hudson, Courtney Love, Christina Ricci and Janeane Garofalo couldn't stop this tale of self-obsessed New Yorkers, set on New Year's Eve 1981, from being utterly ghastly. Chappelle's lushly sideburned taxi-driving stoner-loverman is the best thing about it — but that's not really saying very much.

UNFUNNY KIDNAP CAPER
SCREWED *(2000)*
SNL alumnus Norm MacDonald is a put-upon butler who tries to kidnap his millionaire employer's pooch. Chappelle is a stoned fried-chicken chef who offers to help him. And *Screwed* is a movie that all the pot in the world couldn't render amusing. *CLARK COLLIS*

"THE WORST COMIC GETS LAID MORE THAN THE BEST PLUMBER."

From top: Neal Peters Collection; Steve Granitz/Wireimage.com; Neal Peters Collection; Photofest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The Guide

THEY MAKE 'EM. WE REVIEW 'EM >>

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COACHELLA

The Flaming Lips, the Pixies, Radiohead and one gigantic inflated bubble roll through alt-rock's biggest festival, p166

Clockwise from top left: Phil Knott; Michael Ochs Archives; LFI; Butch Hogan

White Power

Don't let the monkey suits fool you: The Hives are serious fun

THE HIVES
TYRANNOSAURUS HIVES
★★★★
INTERSCOPE

THERE'S A TIME IN EVERY young man's life when he wakes up, sees through the glib lies and bogus conventions of polite society and gets into Devo. OK, maybe there isn't. But there should be.

Two decades after their brief robot shuffle across the world stage, Devo — the goggle-eyed, flowerpot-hatted crew of art geeks from Akron, Ohio — still cast an impressive, oddly shaped shadow on rock. These punk conceptualists scored one hit, the bouncy self-help satire "Whip It" (now playing in a Swiffer ad: "Swiff it good!"), and spent the rest of their 19-year career promoting the social theory of "devolution" and setting the poetry of attempted Reagan assassin John Hinckley Jr. to music. As a model of bizarre pop obfuscation, they're right up there with the Wu-Tang Clan.

Few artists make as fitting carriers of this mutant torch as Sweden's Hives. Not only did their breakthrough album, *Veni Vidi Vicious*, show a profound facility with vintage American punk, but their stated primary influences were the Sex Pistols and Kraftwerk. Extend those two vectors — rampaging postures and cold, costumed electronica — and they intersect squarely at Point Devo.

Which is pretty much exactly what we hear in new Hives titles like "Missing Link" and "See Through Head," and in the herky-jerky guitar and bottom-shaking bass that begins the first single, "Walk Idiot Walk." "See the idiot walk," goes the one-note chorus. "See the idiot talk." It could be a critique of mindless conformity in a post-industrial society, or a new dance sensation. Or both.

We should expect nothing less from those daring young men in white. Returning after an almost three-year hiatus, the Hives are now rock standard-bearers at an average age of 25. Their last album helped make 2002 the International Year of the Necktie and cast them, with the Strokes and the White Stripes, as leaders of a "new rock" movement in which people who grew up during the MC Hammer administration reclaimed the glam styles and guitar intensity of pre-grunge rock & roll.

They have more fun than either the Strokes or the White Stripes.

Both the Strokes and the Stripes did this amazingly well, but neither seemed to have as much fun with it as the Hives did. Clearly stoked by the spirit of the Ramones, the Stooges and the garage-rock *Nuggets* compilation, *Veni Vidi Vicious* pogoed from one fast, infectious, two-minute shout-along to another, which the group performed with vaudevillian esprit: matching outfits, bassist mustache, choreography that included the occasional group "freeze" and the awesome Jagger-esque strut and Iggy-esque flail of pouty-lipped frontman Howlin' Pelle Almqvist.

Tyrannosaurus Hives bursts from the blocks with the ferocious, awesomely titled punk rant "Abra Cadaver" and then subtly initiates a robotic beat style with "Two Timing Touch and Broken Bones." The mechanism winds down a bit as the album unfolds, with rote punk-a-rama exercises like "No Pun Intended" and "Dead Quote Olympics," but the Hives reverse the decline with "Baby You're Alright." A preposterously manic fusion of punk rock and Motown boogaloo, it sounds like an Ike Turner jam played by overwound wind-up monkeys for a frantic all-Muppet throwdown.

"Artistic growth" is something we ask of rock artists less and less these days, maybe least from a group like the Hives, who thrive on a kind of artistic shrinkage — shorter songs, fewer chords, tighter pants. In fact, they might appear to be the perfect band for an era that prizes attitude, jackass stunts and little to no brain-taxing meaning. In many ways, they're a hair's breadth from being a punk version of U.K. metal homage-ists the Darkness.

Growing up as aspiring rock stars in a town called Fagersta can't be easy, but it probably gives you some comic self-awareness — which helps if you're playing *r-a-w-k* at a time when every style feels like a costume purchased at Hot Topic. Even so, the Hives aren't mere jokers, because they mix their novelty-band brio with the genuine anger and disgust of punk rock. Lyrics like "see the robot write up his name on a banner" — shouted by smart guys from a famously progressive country while the rest of the world marches into fundamentalist conflict — sound more pissed and alive than any period exercise.

It's just possible that the Hives are true believers in punk as a vehicle for social outrage. You could just pogo happily to *Tyrannosaurus*. But it doesn't sound like these guys are kidding. *CHRIS NORRIS*

DOWNLOAD THESE "Baby You're Alright," "Walk Idiot Walk," "Two Timing Touch and Broken Bones"

HOWLIN' PELLE ALMQVIST MY CURRENT INSPIRATIONS

SYL SYLVAIN AND THE TEARDROPS
SYL SYLVAIN AND THE TEARDROPS
RCA, 1981
"Syl Sylvain used to be in the New York Dolls, but this is a pop record: a very honest attempt at selling out. It's got what white bands called reggae in 1981, even swing songs. It's fun, happy."

THE SAINTS
ETERNALLY YOURS
TRIPLE X, 1978
"I've listened to this since I was 17. They were an Australian band, aggressive and laid-back at the same time, kind of Stonesy. A lot of punk rockers gave them flak because they used horns instead of just guitars. It's like soul-punk!"

VARIOUS ARTISTS
SONGS THE CRAMPS TAUGHT US
STCTU, 2000
"A collection of songs the Cramps covered or ripped off. It's a lot of old '40s and '50s R&B and rockabilly, and some '60s garage-rock. A lot of it is horror-themed."

DONNA SUMMER
FOUR SEASONS OF LOVE
CASABLANCA, 1976
"We love the sound of Giorgio Moroder–produced disco. It's kind of cheesy, but it has great stop-and-go riffs. Plus, AC/DC and Donna Summer have the same drum sound."
JONAH WEINER

This page: Mr Snuggles (still-lifes, 4). Opposite page: Stefan Zschernitz.

The Hives, from left: guitarist Nicholaus Arson, drummer Chris Dangerous, bassist Dr. Matt Destruction, guitarist Vigilante Carlstroem, singer Howlin' Pelle Almqvist

ALLEN ANTHONY

OAKLAND INTERNATIONAL ✪✪✪

ROC-A-FELLA

California soul man is torn between the sheets and the streets

Like their hero Marvin Gaye, most neosoul singers alternate between their cranium and their crotch, between "What's Going On" and "Let's Get It On." Allen Anthony, formerly of minor R&B duo Christion, should stick with the former. Occasionally, his breathy falsetto recalls Prince, but Prince was never predictable enough to write songs called "Baby" and "Long Walks in the Park," and Anthony sounds like he's going through the loverman motions. His frequent invitations to make love all night long sound about as enticing as a C-SPAN marathon. When Anthony looks beyond the bedroom, however, he soars: "I Choose Love," on which he frets about "poverty, war and AIDS," is clammy with claustrophobia, and the ghetto lament "Ride Wit Me" is a latter-day "Across 110th Street."

DORIAN LYNSKEY

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ANTIBALAS

WHO IS THIS AMERICA? ✪✪✪✪

ROPEADOPE

Fela travelers rouse rabble with election-year afrobeat anthems

Need something to pump that John Kerry fund-raiser full of righteous rhythmic indignation? Look no further than the incendiary third album by Antibalas, a 15-member multiracial Brooklyn collective that plays music inspired by Fela Anikulapo Kuti, the radical Nigerian afrobeat founder who died of an AIDS-related illness in 1997. Antibalas sustain his sinuous sound with funky African orchestral grandeur, punctuating long molten guitar-horn-drum grooves with jazzy keyboard and sax solos. Vocals resemble a network news ticker. Singers Abraham Amayo and Ernesto Abreu editorialize about American identity with a mesmerizing string of acronyms ("EPA, FCC, NFL, NBC, NBA, WB . . .") on the title track, declaim lyrics of unapologetic feminism in the 19-minute "Sister" and offer a scathing indictment of Dick Cheney, Donald Rumsfeld and George W. Bush's whole crew.

RICHARD GEHR

DOWNLOAD THESE "Who Is This America Dem Speak of Today?", "Elephant"

Beenie Man awaits Beenie Woman.

BABY

BABY ✪✪✪

NERVELAND

D.C. art-punk makes his big pop move

When Craig Wedren led Shudder to Think in the '90s, their eccentric hard rock often hinted at yearnings for something more bubblegummish. He started indulging his pop-glam impulses with his songs for *Velvet Goldmine* and *School of Rock*, but this is his headfirst dive into Top 40–style production — burbling synths, slickly treated guitars — aided by bandmate Amy Miles and her Sheryl Crow–inflected vocals. Of course, Wedren's songwriting itself is as perversely ticcy as ever, as when he sneers the title of "Slowdown" more than 100 times in a row; just as most of these songs are about to enter *TRL* territory, they flash their screwed-up side. Surprisingly, Wedren's fluttering, whooping voice sounds more at home here than it ever has before.

DOUGLAS WOLK

DOWNLOAD THESE "Free Los Angeles," "Day Ditty"

BEENIE MAN

BACK TO BASICS ✪✪✪

VIRGIN

Charismatic lord of the dancehall two-times his way through a bevy of musical styles

On his last album, Beenie Man enlisted Janet Jackson and the Neptunes, flirting with American crossover. Here, he has promised a return to dancehall roots — but even at his most basic, the Kingston-based toaster is too musically promiscuous to keep his ➔

From top: Jonathan Mannion; Oluwaseye Olufa

FUR SURE

The Harlem gangsta behind "Oh Boy" returns for his fourth album

CAM'RON

PURPLE HAZE ✪✪✪✪

DIPLOMATS/ROC-A-FELLA

» CAM'RON'S COUP: He raps bad brilliantly. Most MCs get respect for how *much* they can do — how many rhythmic back flips they land, how nuanced their tales are. From his 1998 debut through his 2002 platinum-plus breakthrough, Cam'ron's trick has been radically different: He flaunts how *little*.

Minimalist and obsessive, the 28-year-old thug repeats phrases and sounds, mutating them and shifting meanings. On the great single "Lord You Know," he compares a hustler's arrest to the Twin Towers' collapse: "It wasn't 9/11, but it was 9-1-1/Gave him nine plus one, dropped a dime on dun/I told him get his .9 and run."

The song finds sadness in the rub between heavy-hearted synths and R&B singer Jaheim's pleading hook. Callous MCs such as Cam often use sorrowful beats as emotional prosthetics, backdrops for routine mama-pologies. Here, he conveys pain ingeniously: "Hustlin' is a hassle/Percoset, Demerol, capsules of Paxil," he raps, leaving it ambiguous whether he's pushing antidepressants — or popping them for relief.

Mostly, though, crack gets cooked, bitches give blow jobs, money piles up. Rote stuff, so it's best when he loses himself in a word buzz, delighting in sound over sense. On "Get 'Em Girls," he's a gangsta Ned Flanders: "I'm low-key, low-key/Leave you poky-poky/No Rice-a-Roni/That's the okey-dokey." Catchy and hard, it's like Missy gibberish swathed in 50 Cent menace.

The beats reflect that balance. Some are aggressively insane ("Shake"), others adore pop (the Cyndi Lauper–interpolating "Girls Just Wanna Have Fun"). Cam'ron writes pop hooks and avant-garde rhymes while staying as close to the streets as a manhole cover. *JONAH WEINER*

DOWNLOAD THESE "Lord You Know," "Down and Out," "Shake"

CAM'RON'S CURRENT LISTENING

» **JIM JONES**
THE GHETTO DISCIPLE ON MY WAY TO CHURCH
KOCH

» **JUELZ SANTANA**
I'M MOVING
DIPLOMATS/ROC-A-FELLA

Cam'ron, pictured shortly after skinning Barney

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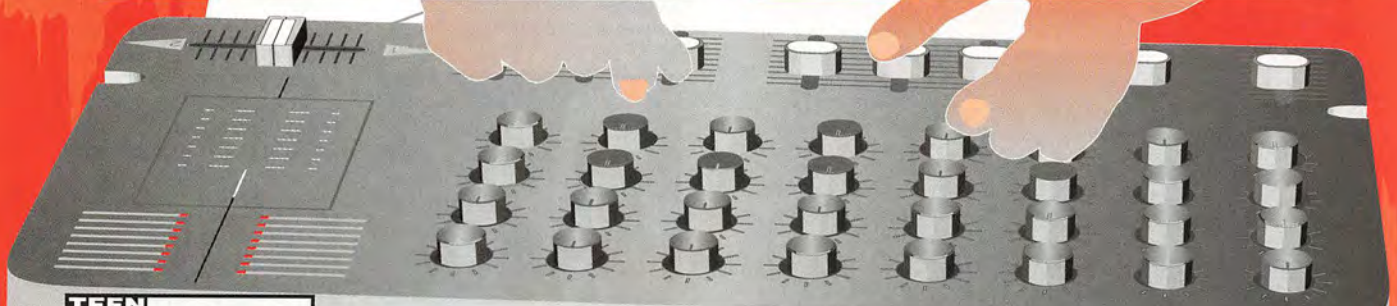

TEEN T Mild Lyrics
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The Cure present *Goth Eye for the Straight Guy.*

GHOST FACE

Face painted and heart heavy, Robert Smith returns

THE CURE

THE CURE ✪✪

I AM/GEFFEN

BREAKING UP IS hard to do. Just ask Robert Smith: After 25 years of lipstick traces and black lightbulbs, the big-haired bandleader retired the Cure in 2000. But you can't keep a sad man down! Only four years later, he returns with a barrelful of fresh woes, reuniting the band's early-'90s lineup and enlisting Korn and limpbizkit producer Ross Robinson. Now that iPods are overflowing with a new generation of homeopathic Cures, from the Rapture to Evanescence, the timing couldn't be better for a comeback.

Over the years, the Cure have taken many different guises — whip-smart punks, doomy goth miserablists and (most successfully) top-notch dance-popsters. Here, they come off more than ever like a caricature, the house band for some ageless sect of whiners wearing black scarfs. Smith still has one of pop's most recognizable voices — the gasp of a pampered Englishman spilling his claret — and an unparalleled knack for documenting the downside of teenage kicks (like the mope-tastic "Pictures of You" or "Lovesong"). But the only depression that interests him here is his own. "Nothing in the room has changed/Love is dead," he howls on "Labyrinth," while crushingly heavy guitars feed back and squeal around him. The charm of the Cure was always the play between indulgent ballads and goofy pop; this album's unrelenting gloom only brings the wrinkles behind Smith's face paint into relief.

> They come off more than ever like a caricature.

On the discordant album opener, "Lost," he shrieks "I can't find myself" ad nauseam, and the closing "The Promise" is a 10-minute swamp of loops and squeals. The problem isn't that Smith's been inconsolable for three decades — hey, Paxil isn't for everyone — it's that his sorrow here is monochromatic and his music claustrophobic. Throughout, guitars drone, drums pound, keyboards sound like rain, repeat. There are a few breaks of sunlight, including the single "The End of the World" and "Taking Off," a strummy echo of 1992's chart-topping *Wish*. After that, it's right back into the abyss. *ANDY GREENWALD*

DOWNLOAD THESE "The End of the World," "Taking Off"

ROBERT SMITH'S CURRENT LISTENING

>> **ELBOW** CAST OF THOUSANDS *V2*

>> **KEANE** HOPES AND FEARS *INTERSCOPE*

hands tied to just one genre. Thanks to producers Lenky Marsden (the mastermind who inspired Sean Paul's "Get Busy" and Lumidee's "Uh Oh") and Tony Kelly, even the most hardcore riddims here percolate with moments of silky soul, pop and gospel. The undeniable high point is "Dude," a joyous, sexed-up cocktail of Diwali-esque handclaps and traditional calypso. After guest fluffer Ms. Thing has laid out her relationship requirements ("I want a dude who will do me in his van"), Beenie Man explains, in his sandpapery lilt, why he's just the rude boy for the job. *G. BEATO*

DOWNLOAD THESE "Dude," "If a Neva God"

BRANDY

AFRODISIAC ✪✪✪

ATLANTIC

Newly single television star, 25, grapples with adult feelings

R&B MILF

Brandy's fourth album feels like an episode of her growing-pains TV show, *Moesha:* This week, our honey-voiced heroine sheds her girlishness, sexing up to become "a woman, a passionate woman." Since Brandy recently divorced her producer-songwriter husband and became a single mother, the change is suitable, and she begins with a makeover. More than half the album is produced by Timbaland, who brings a sharp rhythmic punch, tickled with tablas and Indian flutes. Ages removed from her oversynthed old sound, the new juice brings out her angry side: She vents against men who have cheated, may have cheated or have merely "peeped" another girl. But deep down, fighting isn't in Moesha's character. In two Kanye West songs, she finds what it means to have a grown-up relationship: In "Talk About Our Love," the irresistible first single, a couple learns to ignore painful rumors. Brandy even learns a lesson tidy enough for Moesha. As she tells West, it's not the anger that matters, or the confusion — "All that matters is us." Isn't that sweet? *BEN SISARIO*

DOWNLOAD THESE "Talk About Our Love," "Say You Will"

Bumblebeez 81: "Mmmpf!"

BRAZIL

A HOSTAGE AND THE MEANING OF LIFE ✪✪

FEARLESS

It's the second wave of emo-prog: Hide your Luke Skywalker action figures

Not very long ago, in a galaxy rather close by (upstate New York), a band called Coheed & Cambria combined sweet, angst-filled emo yearning with the dramatic pomp and sci-fi fetish of prog-rock, sparking major-label interest. So consider this album *Episode 2: Attack of the Clones.* Coheed tourmates Brazil (named after the 1985 Terry Gilliam movie about a dystopian future, not after the country) are an ambitious sextet that never met a song they couldn't transform into a symphony. On the overstuffed anthems "The Novemberist" and "Iconoclast," high-voiced singer Jonathon Newby howls about "skies that fall forever" while his bandmates saw manfully at cellos and guitars. "Form and Function" actually begins with what sounds like an instrumental outtake from *Star Trek,* proving either that they've got a fantastic sense of humor or — more likely — they're in desperate need of one. *ANDY GREENWALD*

DOWNLOAD THIS "Hostage"

BUMBLEBEEZ 81

PRINTZ ✪✪✪

MODULAR/81/GEFFEN

Australian siblings create a cut-n'-paste portrait of NYC hipster life

Chris Colonna spent the early '00s partying hard and attending art school in New York, absorbing the collage spirit of painter Jean-Michel Basquiat and the trendy Williamsburg rock vibe. He returned to his family's farm in rural Australia, vomiting hours of lo-fi music onto a computer with the help of his kid sister, Pia. The edited result is an anarchic blend of sleazy loops, punk energy, silly chants and incomprehensible Caucasian rapping. Pia, under the code name Vila, free-associates lines like "Flowing so high/Flying so wry/Be like a virgin/Keeping it tight," while Chris tosses off one-liners (e.g., "I left my baby in Brooklyn"). The group aims for a mix of artistry and cred, à la N.E.R.D. or the Beastie Boys, but their music is rarely as catchy. It's good for a rough sketch of hipster life and a brief sugar buzz. *ALEC HANLEY BEMIS*

DOWNLOAD THIS "Microphone Diseases"

VINICIUS CANTUÁRIA

HORSE AND FISH ✪✪

BAR/NONE

Brazilian singer-songwriter gets dangerously mellow

On paper, an homage to the gentle, airy vibe of classic bossa nova sounds like a

From top: Kevin Estrada, Pieter M. Van Hattem

natural for Vinicius Cantuária; in the second decade since he left Caetano Veloso's band, his tender-fingered guitar and reserved singing have often drawn on the older strain of Brazilian pop. Here, his percussion-heavy sextet lock smoothly into subtle, rattling grooves, and they keep their playing precise and liquid — even when the songs evolve into loose, understated jams. But *bossa nova* literally means *new wave*, reminding us that Cantuária's inspirations (including Gilberto Gil and Antonio Carlos Jobim, both of whom he covers here) made records as startling as they were lovely. Too often, Cantuária settles for the lovely part — the originals here are so placid and whispery that they evaporate on arrival.

DOUGLAS WOLK

DOWNLOAD THIS "Procissão"

CHOMSKY

LET'S GET TO SECOND ✪✪✪

AEZRA

Like MIT's all-time greatest campus band — but from Texas!

Chomsky are smarter than you. These four nerdy Friendsters — who named themselves after a contentious lefty political theorist — come off like indie-rock cyborgs who grew up studying math equations and listening to nothing but Weezer. Singer Sean Halleck peppers these herky-jerky, angular pop tunes with references to crop circles and obscure Russian military figures, but it doesn't mean he's showing off — much. Besides, it's hard to quibble with them when the results are so catchy. "00:15:00" is a joyful algebraic theorem about rocking out, and "Light" rides a Bela Lugosi horror-organ riff to an irresistible chorus that's either about a breakup or a science-fair project gone awry. Geeks 1, Jocks 0.

ANDY GREENWALD

DOWNLOAD THESE "Light," "Gravitate"

CONCRETE BLONDE

MOJAVE ✪✪✪

ELEVEN THIRTY/HAPPY HERMIT

Sturdy post-punk trio from Los Angeles kicks sand in your eyes

Concrete Blonde begin and end with the overpowering force of singer Johnette Napolitano — buy a ticket to her voice and you might wake up a week later, hung over in Hong Kong, wondering "Wha' hoppen?" She takes you places. *Mojave* is inspired by the desert Napolitano lives near — the songs are full of lizards and loners, the best tune sticks up for the coyote and there's even a spooky cover of the old cowboy song "Ghost Riders in the Sky." The songs on Concrete Blonde's eighth studio album are appropriately boomy and a little spaced-out. There are a few too many Doorsy vamps and not enough hooks — but then again, you don't expect a parade float in the desert; you expect atmosphere, and that Napolitano's got to spare.

RJ SMITH

DOWNLOAD THESE "Hey Coyote," "Jim Needs an Animal," "'A' Road"

The Fiery Furnaces, astonished to see a photographer on their hood

ASTONISHING FACT! >>

When he was 9, JAY FARRAR competed on the obscure kids' game show *DB's Delight* — he was beaten by a slim margin!

MATTHEW DEAR

BACKSTROKE ✪✪✪✪

SPECTRAL

One of dance music's leading nerds emulates Elmore Leonard

Matthew Dear is a Detroit-based Texan who swims in electro pools rarely crowded by Americans, let alone with such purposeful flair. His music could be ghettoized as "chill-out"; in fact, it's just new pop-rock-dance for that sizeable minority of listeners who find guitars and pianos depressing. The music vaguely recalls Richie Hawtin's — but where the Canadian DJ's ongoing obsession is the sound of Manolo Blahniks piercing bubble wrap, Dear likes nubbier, more rounded-off sound particles and sparing, unexcited vocals. Pieces such as "Tide," a way-modern breakup tune, and "I Know Howser," which unleashes with the off-hand speed of a fast-paced crime thriller, never dawdle. In its precocious, fast and slightly spooky way, Dear's music is neither dogmatic about electronicism nor sentimental about rock.

JAMES HUNTER

DOWNLOAD THESE "I Know Howser," "Tide," "Takes on You"

JAY FARRAR

STONE, STEEL & BRIGHT LIGHTS ✪✪✪

TRANSMIT SOUND

Uncle Tupelo frontman kicks out the soft stuff on live disc

As the leader of alt-country pioneers Uncle Tupelo and, later, Son Volt, Jay Farrar boasts a rich catalog of windswept epics and boozy barn-burners. He ignores that legacy on his second live album, strolling instead through selections from his more austere solo career. Backed by D.C. emo-country act Canyon, the brainy songwriter strips his dense songs of the fussy, effects-heavy production that marred the studio versions. Of the two new compositions, the antiwar ballad "Doesn't Have to Be This Way" glows with a hushed simplicity. But when it comes to amping up the energy, Farrar falls back on a pair of covers from Pink Floyd (Syd Barrett's "Lucifer Sam") and Neil Young ("Like a Hurricane"). Given the overly somber proceedings, a tear through the Uncle Tupelo anthem "Whiskey Bottle" would have provided a much-needed kick in the pants.

ROSS RAIHALA

DOWNLOAD THESE "Doesn't Have to Be This Way," "Damn Shame"

The Fever await the arrival of Humpty Dumpty.

THE FEVER

RED BEDROOM ✪✪✪

KEMADO

Debauched and sleazy, NYC fivesome make the soundtrack to passing out in a stinky nightclub bathroom

Buried up to their skinny ties in synthetic disco-punk glamour, this New York quintet have made a hedonistic debut that's thick with the stench of leatherette and fake fur. Frontman Geremy Jasper is an attention-hogging party boy, thrashing through lovesick tantrums. His bratty hiccups fall across spangly guitars, an impatient rhythm section and crude organ riffs that add a touch of carnival swagger. The mid-tempo tracks have a certain choked grandeur, but the best songs here move too quickly — part of the fun is hearing the band make a mess as they try to keep up with themselves. Working a sweaty, sloppy mix of high drama and vintage sleaze, these boys could seduce even the most committed anti-nostalgist into yanking the white belt out of storage.

DENNIS LIM

DOWNLOAD THESE "Cold Blooded," "Ladyfingers"

THE FIERY FURNACES

BLUEBERRY BOAT ✪✪

ROUGH TRADE

Hipster siblings invite you into their rec room on second album

Brother and sister Matt and Eleanor Friedberger play music as if they never left their parents' basement. On their acclaimed 2003 debut, the Brooklyn duo playfully smeared raw blues with psychedelia; here, they abruptly switch instruments and rhythms mid-song, cobbling disjointed compositions from canned loops, primitive riffs and sing-songy melodies. Eleanor sings as though she's playing make-believe, inflecting nonsense lyrics with pouty belligerence or gentle dreaminess. Meanwhile, multi-instrumentalist Matt begs to be edited: The 10-minute "Quay Cur" shifts inexplicably from whirring electronica to racing acoustic pop to piano lullaby (not to mention an unfortunate rap), exhausting the charm of its individual parts. Even the three-minute "I Lost My Dog" wears thin, thanks to a long, frantic guitar solo. Save all this ➔

I LOVE THIS CD!

ANTONIO SABATO JR.
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BEBEL GILBERTO

BEBEL GILBERTO ✪✪✪

ZIRIGUIBOOM/SIX DEGREES

Bossa nova's Lisa Marie Presley — only talented!

After making a splash on the club circuit with her electro-samba debut, 2000's *Tanto Tempo*, Bebel Gilberto has unhooked the samplers and gone back to bossa nova roots. Given that her dad is João Gilberto — the Elvis of bossa nova — that shouldn't seem a shock, but what's surprising is that cranking down the beats hasn't cost her sophomore album its pop appeal. There are still some ambient electronics around the edges, but the key is the chemistry between Bebel's sultry, insinuating voice and the lush, enveloping backing tracks. Whether playing off the percolating percussion of the feisty "Aganjú" or working the lonely quiet of "Every Day You've Been Away," her singing is warm, evocative and utterly seductive — even the parts in Portuguese.
J.D. CONSIDINE
DOWNLOAD THESE "River Song," "Aganjú"

GOODIE MOB

ONE MONKEY DON'T STOP NO SHOW ✪✪

GOODIE MOB/KOCH

Atlanta's other freaky funk-hoppers get mean

Before Outkast were pimping their plaid suits and drum-machine spasms to the pop masses, Goodie Mob were Atlanta's preeminent far-out, feel-good crew. Their fourth LP finds T-Mo, Khujo and Big Gipp at an awkward crossroads — the titular "monkey" is, presumably, departed member Cee-Lo, who seems to have taken their spirit with him. The subtle, Southern-fried eccentricity of their heyday pops up occasionally ("God I Wanna Live"), but the bulk of *One Monkey* finds the boys trying too hard to distance themselves from their former weirdness. Their earthy positivity is no more: "Grindin' " and "In Da Streets" are generic tough-guy crunk tracks, while the harshly cynical "Goodiadvice" scraps the free-thinking optimism they once joyously pimped. The show goes on, unfortunately.
HUA HSU
DOWNLOAD THIS "God I Wanna Live"

HAZEN STREET

HAZEN STREET ✪✪

D.C. FLAG

Good Charlotte give their homies a lift on the pop-punk express — let's hope they bought return tickets

Hazen Street are beneficiaries of the newly rich and famous Good Charlotte's charity. The MTV-friendly punk superstars have started a label with the express purpose of giving buddies like these a little shine. But while this five-piece has the pedigree for mainstream success — the band is a not-quite-supergroup of NYC punk lifers including members of Madball, Box Car Racer and H2O — their debut stumbles between the pop charts and the DIY ghetto. Vehemently opposed to the mallification of punk, Hazen Street sound like they'd rather beat up the average Good Charlotte fan than cater to him —

I LOVE THIS CD!

ADAM BRODY
ACTOR ON *THE O.C.*

DEATH CAB FOR CUTIE TRANSATLANTICISM
BARSUK

"Amazing indie-rock that hits all emotional notes and is full of great songs. I have their poster on the wall in my *O.C.* bedroom."

From top: Mil Cannon; Walter McBride/Retna Ltd.

they're aggressive, their lyrics fistfight-friendly. "Fool the World" and "Stick Up Kid" bop and swagger like a second coming of Rancid, but dubious dalliances with rapping and reggae on "Tomorrow" and "Hazen Outro" are just plain rancid.

ANDY GREENWALD

DOWNLOAD THESE "Fool the World," "Trouble"

THE IZZYS

THE IZZYS ✪✪✪

KANINE

Blues, sleaze and boogie to make Mick, Keith and Iggy proud

Retro-rock is no longer a radical choice for a band; the only question is, which three bands of yore do you copy? New York trio the Izzys go back a little further than most, to the jagged, bluesy romps of *Exile on Main Street*–era Rolling Stones ("Highway Blues"), with a harsh edge coming from the minimalist tough-guy boogie of the early Stooges ("Little Sally Water"). The result is sleek and sleazy, and in the down-tempo dirge "You Got Me Crying," the extra ingredient of Gram Parsons's lonelyheart country whine lends a bit of emotional depth. There's nothing terribly witty or original about the down-and-out lyrics ("Hell hath no fury/As a woman pissed"), but singer-guitarist Mike Storey keeps every line fresh with thin, sneering howls that seem to kick-start every groove.

BEN SISARIO

DOWNLOAD THESE "Little Sally Water," "Turning Round"

RILO KILEY

MORE ADVENTUROUS ✪✪✪✪

BRUTE/BEAUTE

With third album, L.A.-based child stars–turned–indie-rockers are ready for their closeup

Playing opposite Fred Savage in 1989's Nintendo flick *The Wizard*, Jenny Lewis became a dream girl for every sore-thumbed adolescent with a bedside Zelda poster. Fifteen years later, as the lead singer of these indie-rock darlings (alongside guitarist Blake Sennett, best known as Pinsky on Nickelodeon's *Salute Your Shorts*), she's making music for those same lovelorn loners. This album is ambitiously wide-ranging, from breezy folk-pop symphonies ("It's a Hit" and the title track) to *Rashomon*-style storytelling ("A Man/Me/Then Jim") and even some blue-eyed soul ("I Never"). Lewis holds everything together with her sweet-voiced self-assurance and a knack for cutting straight to the heart of her troubles, as when she sums up the tragic nature of relationships in just 18 words: "The talking leads to touching, and the touching leads to sex/And then there is no mystery left."

JOSH EELLS

DOWNLOAD THESE "Portions for Foxes," "More Adventurous"

k.d. lang loves to do sit-ups!

Jen Heiden

ASTONISHING FACT! >>

KITTIE drummer Mercedes Lander is so afraid of zombies that she keeps *The Zombie Survival Guide* by her bedside at all times.

KITTIE

UNTIL THE END ✪✪✪

ARTEMIS

Young Canuck thrashers come of age on third record

Like Rodney Dangerfield in a training bra, Kittie got no respect for the jailbait metal of their gold-selling 2000 debut, *Spit*. To win some dap from dudes with neck tattoos, the four ladies super-sized their hate on 2001's harmony-deficient *Oracle*, sounding like Pantera with that not-so-fresh feeling and splitting their sales by half. Armed with 50-mega-ton choruses, Kittie put hooks over hellfire this time around. Frontwoman Morgan Lander lays arena-bound refrains atop head-butt guitars on the album highlight "Red Flag." They still have plenty of growl left in them: When Lander snarls "My heart still bleeds for you" on "Pussy Sugar," it sounds as if her knuckles do as well.

JASON BRACELIN

DOWNLOAD THESE "Red Flag," "Into the Darkness"

K.D. LANG

HYMNS OF THE 49TH PARALLEL ✪✪✪✪

WARNER BROS.

lang pays tribute to her home turf with a stunning Canadian songbook

Americans are such snobs about Canadian musicians; the really great ones we practically claim as our own. This collection of covers is k.d. lang's gentle reminder that some of rock's most treasured songwriters belong to the north country. Every track is stellar: lang breathes dreamy

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The Roots lie in wait for Santa.

PHILLY FREAKS

For Illadelphia alt-rap heroes, funk passes, rhymes fail

THE ROOTS

THE TIPPING POINT ✪✪✪

GEFFEN

>> "STAR," THE SPRAWLING seven-minute track that kicks off *The Tipping Point*, embodies everything great, but also everything godawful, about alternative-rap torch-bearers the Roots. A clattering, reverb-swathed gloss on Sly and the Family Stone's funk hit "Everybody Is a Star," "Star" distills their strengths: the genre-melding expansiveness and the mighty rhythmic imagination that churns beneath drummer Ahmir "?uestlove" Thompson's supersize afro.

But six minutes in, it grinds to a halt, and a velvet-voiced "poet" arrives to intone pompous free verse over a tinkling Fender Rhodes: "The tipping point! . . . Art has not been drowned and life-music will thrust its branches from the bud of wackness."

Twelve years, six studio albums and a thousand torrid live shows into their career, the Roots are an anomaly: a certifiably great band that is hard to love. Their records are smart, ambitious, funky — and as grim and self-serious as a dissertation defense. Didn't anybody ever tell these guys about rocking the party?

The Tipping Point makes some strides toward redressing the fun deficit. Abandoning the wild sonic experimentation of *Phrenology* (2002), the Roots have made their loosest record, featuring a handful of songs as sleek and straightforward as anything in their catalog. The synth washes and twitching percussion on "Don't Say Nuthin' " aim straight at commercial radio; the thudding, quicksilver "Boom" genuflects in the direction of old-school heroes Kool G Rap and Big Daddy Kane; "Web" is hip-hop at its most deliciously spartan, a trio scored for voice, ride cymbal and a single buzzing bass note. Throughout, ?uestlove's drumming is so heroic, you're almost inclined to forgive the epic prog-hop solo that closes the album.

A certifiably great band — but hard to love.

But as on previous Roots records, it's hard to shake the feeling that this is a collection of dope beats in search of some rhymes. Rapper Black Thought is the Roots' albatross, a fluid, competent, utterly bland MC, so steeped in the pretensions of his patchouli-scented corner of the hip-hop nation that he's incapable of writing punch lines. "We all-stars, and we highly evolved," goes a typical couplet. "Hip-hop, it's not pop like Kylie Minogue." Behold: the bud of wackness. *JODY ROSEN*

DOWNLOAD THESE "Star," "Duck Down," "Guns Are Drawn"

?UESTLOVE'S CURRENT LISTENING

>> **DWELE** *SUBJECT VIRGIN*

>> **NINTH WONDER** *BLACK IS BACK (REMIX PROJECT) NO LABEL*

detachment into Neil Young's "After the Gold Rush," takes the wispiness out of Joni Mitchell's "A Case of You," wrings homespun philosophy out of Jane Siberry's "Love Is Everything" and swoops dazzlingly into and out of notes on Leonard Cohen's "Hallelujah." The arrangements combine somber orchestrations with acoustic guitar and thrumming upright bass, but Iang's voice is the prize instrument; like a modern Sinatra, she transcends even the finest work the authors offer.

KAREN SCHOEMER

DOWNLOAD THESE "After the Gold Rush," "Bird on a Wire," "Love Is Everything"

LOUQUE

SO LONG ✪✪✪

EVERFINE/NEW LAFAYA/LAVA

Cool-hand Cajun masters melancholia on style-juggling debut

Based in NYC's hipster-dominated enclave of Williamsburg, Brooklyn, the band Louque (pronounced *luke*) mine a stylistic fusion of folk, soul, dancehall reggae and electronic. On paper, it sounds a bit too self-consciously disparate for its own good; fortunately, Louisiana-born frontman Dustan Louque balances his influences with great subtlety and taste. His endearing, raspy vocals (which suggest Steven Tyler gone contemplative on a Big Easy vacation) settle comfortably over some exquisitely moody arrangements (the Portishead-esque "Perique"; a tender rendition of Mazzy Star's "Cry Cry"). Louque lose some of their charm when the BPMs pick up (the flaccid "Lifeline"). Meanwhile, "Kenny the Jet" makes it painfully obvious that they've as much business bustin' rhymes as does Clay Aiken. Otherwise, though, this is masterfully bittersweet and introspective. *CHAIRMAN MAO*

DOWNLOAD THESE "Perique," "Cry Cry"

JESSE MALIN

THE HEAT ✪✪✪

ARTEMIS

Former D Generation frontman sings big-city stories about dark corners

Jesse Malin has friends in high places — Bruce Springsteen recently backed him

Jesse Malin: "You call that a caption?"

From top: Justin Francis, Saline Project, Paul Storey

up live, Ryan Adams produced his first record and Pete Yorn appears here — but it's lowlifes who inspire him. On his second solo set of urban-edged heartland rock, the onetime glam punk peers into the dark corners of Manhattan's East Village and, in his glum, rough-edged murmur, catalogues the hopes and disappointments he finds there. The restless opener, "Mona Lisa," hitches rapid-fire, gossipy monologues about alcoholic, pot dealing, cross-dressing, virginity-losing characters to a cheerful, handclap-accented shrug of a chorus. Malin's melodic sweep burnishes Adams's grimy guitar on "Silver Manhattan," but organ-laced acoustic ballads like "Block Island" are a tad too drowsy for the disc's tough topics. Remember, the city never sleeps.

NICK CATUCCI

DOWNLOAD THESE "Mona Lisa," "Since You're in Love"

TEENA MARIE

LA DOÑA ✪✪✪✪

CASH MONEY CLASSICS/UNIVERSAL

Rick James's old flame demands respect in stirringly soulful comeback

More than 20 years ago, her close relationship with Rick James and a precocious taste for hip-hop (the flirty, half-rapped "Square Biz" was a soul smash in '81) made Teena Marie the only white R&B star on Motown. But *La Doña* is no exercise in *I Love the '80s*. True, the steamy "A Rose by Any Other Name," with soft-crooner Gerald Levert, evokes her heavy-breathing duets with James, while "I'm Still in Love" rides a slinky old-school groove. But most of the reference points are from the present, and there are useful guest spots from younger stars who admire Marie. She transforms the Destiny's Child hit "Say My Name" into "The Mackin' Game," a tart comment on relationships spiced by MC Lyte, and easily adapts her soul inflections to a dancehall beat for "Recycle Hate to Love." Definitely a mom who likes to funk.

J.D. CONSIDINE

DOWNLOAD THESE "I'm Still In Love," "A Rose by Any Other Name," "Recycle Hate to Love" ➔

I LOVE THIS CD!

JOHN CLEESE
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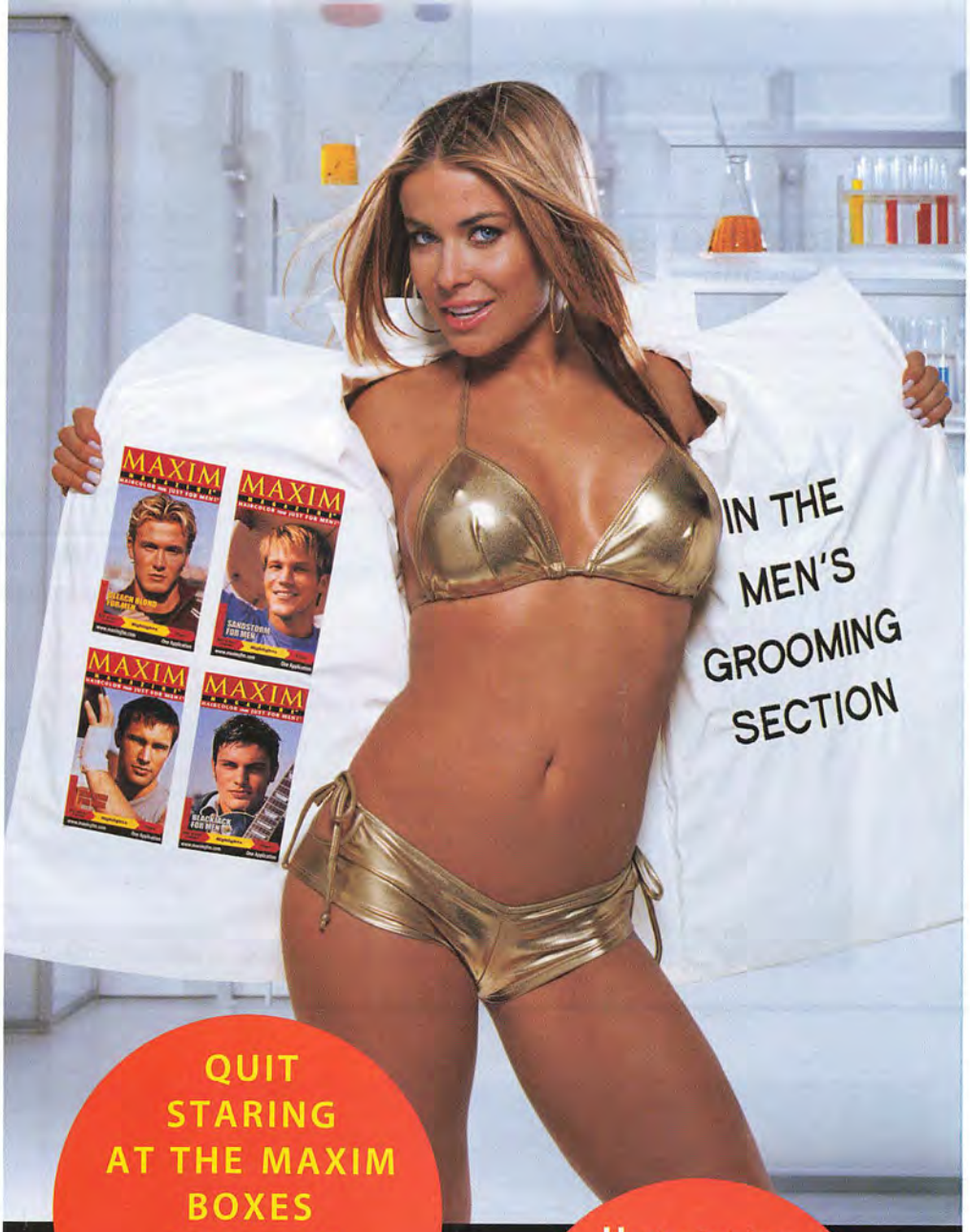

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GEORGE MICHAEL

PATIENCE ✪✪✪

EPIC

Eighties giganto-star, all grown up and out, holds onto the sweetness

George Michael was the white Prince — all weird sex, genius songcraft and label spats. But that was years ago, before his covers album, before he abandoned dance-pop and before it was obvious the sex he wanted was the kind the men know, but the little girls don't understand. Which of these changes moved him to the *Billboard* has-bin? A little of everything, of course. But a prince's share of his royal talent survives. His fifth album has its share of overserious croon-and-broods ("My Mother Had a Brother," "American Angel"), but Michael can still walk the bridge from Elton John to Rufus Wainwright for a falsetto ballad, sneak back to the disco for some thick synth-funk and leave you reeling with the beauty of his voice — too late for everything, but built to last.

RENE VIENET

DOWNLOAD THESE "Round Here," "Freeek! '04"

George Michael loves reading Mobb Deep reviews.

MOBB DEEP

AMERIKAZ NIGHTMARE ✪✪✪

JIVE/VIOLATOR

Sixth album from Queens gangstas who packed heat back when 50 Cent was a youngster

Mobb Deep have spent a career keeping sunlight out of their music. Their tracks are gaunt, sullen: When they sing to ladies (2001's "Hey Luv"), it sounds like a requiem; when they visit da club (the sinister new single "Got It Twisted"), be sure someone will get shot in the VIP. This uncompromising principle has turned the duo from landmarks into footnotes. Their grim *The Infamous* (1995) was a masterwork: As they narrated petty crime and sudden bloodshed, haunting loops insisted that this violence wreaked hell inside, too. Nine years later, the tone is just as bleak. "Fire" wrings menace from a two-note melody, "We Up" is a nightmare about "squeezing a gun that don't work" and "Throw Ya Hands" features Kanye West's noisiest, darkest beat ever. But where they once spun enveloping hood vérité, here they list gangsta signifiers without building a world from them.

JONAH WEINER

DOWNLOAD THESE "Got It Twisted," "Throw Ya Hands," "We Up"

THE MOONEY SUZUKI

ALIVE & AMPLIFIED ✪✪

COLUMBIA

Odd-couple teaming of NYC retro-rockers and Avril Lavigne's hitmakers fails to ignite

Since the late '90s, these garage revivalists have feverishly pimped the tenets of classic rock to excess: attitude, innuendo, bicyclist-tight Levi's. On their third album and major-label debut, the foursome broaden their horizons, hooking up with mainstream pop wizards the Matrix (Avril Lavigne, Liz Phair). Unfortunately, this intriguing partnership fizzles. The Matrix maximize every song's hooky potential, most notably on the title track, but main Mooney Sammy James Jr.'s anthems posture hopelessly: The generic "Loose 'N' Juicy" and "Messin' in the Dressin' Room" strain for sexual bravado, while "Sometimes Somethin' " is a cloying Bic-lighter ballad. This is rock theater of the most uninspired kind.

TIM GRIERSON

DOWNLOAD THIS "Alive & Amplified"

MOTÖRHEAD

INFERNO ✪✪✪

METAL-IS/SANCTUARY

With 27 years under their studded belts, England's best metallers are as leatherbound as ever

Motörhead auteur Lemmy Kilmister may be an ex-prog-rocker whose musical knowledge is more profound than that of any 10 record-store hipsters, a Ph.D.-level expert on European history and a lyricist of range and depth, but his means of expression is some of the least subtle music on earth. It's as if Gallagher turned out to have the talent of Charlie Chaplin but couldn't lose the watermelon. Sometimes, as on the 1991 World War I–themed opus *1916*, Kilmister actually attempts art. And sometimes, as here, he just rocks out on the time-honored Motörhead tip, complete with throat-cancer vocals, crusty speed-freak guitars and triple-time bass riffs that churn like a bellyful of tainted shrimp. In the endless stream of Motörhead repackages and best-ofs, *Inferno* could pass for a greatest-hits album if you were hearing the band for the first time, a fragrant chunk of superloud rhythm and roar. Now if only there were a way to scrub out the occasional whiny guitar solos from studio whore Steve Vai.

JONATHAN GOLD

DOWNLOAD THESE "Terminal Show," "Suicide"

JASON MRAZ

TONIGHT, NOT AGAIN ✪✪✪

ELEKTRA

Baby-faced Virginia singer-songwriter cranks up the charm on jammy concert disc

There are times when Jason Mraz seems utterly possessed by melody, so

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I LOVE THIS CD!

BRAD PITT
ACTOR IN *TROY*

FRANZ FERDINAND
FRANZ FERDINAND
EPIC

"They're a fun Scottish band — they're really upbeat, which I enjoy. This has definitely been my jones lately."

From top: James Dimmock; John Spellman/Retna Ltd

Guess where Jason Mraz hides his smaller hat.

overwhelmed by the flow of notes that he resorts to nonsense syllables, leaving his songs full of so many *da-diddlies* you'd think he cowrote them with Ned Flanders. It's endearingly goofy — not that his lyrics are weak, as there's plenty of wit in the wry, rap-inflected "The Remedy (I Won't Worry)," from his 2002 debut, *Waiting for My Rocket to Come*. Slightly more than half of that album is reprised on this 14-song CD/DVD. The wildly enthusiastic Milwaukee audience sounds just as sold on the new stuff, though, thanks to the backing band's jazzy proficiency (augmented for two songs by Blues Traveler's John Popper) and Mraz's own exuberant charm.
J.D. CONSIDINE

DOWNLOAD THESE "So Unusual (Not So Usual)," "No Stopping Us"

MY CHEMICAL ROMANCE

THREE CHEERS FOR SWEET REVENGE ✪✪✪

REPRISE

Emo goes to Broadway on New Jersey rockers' histrionic second album

EMO DRAMA QUEENS

In most high schools, the punks and drama dorks never sit together at lunch, let alone talk about music. Emo must be the great equalizer, then — there's no other explanation for an album at once so theatrical and hysterical as My Chemical Romance's major-label debut. Singer Gerard Way used to draw comic books for a living, until a bad breakup and 9/11 inspired him to form a band that conflates ex-girlfriends with vampires. These songs (with inspired titles like "You Know What They Do to Guys Like Us in Prison" and "It's Not a Fashion Statement, It's a Deathwish") come off like the Cure gone hyper, clearly inspired by Way's screamy buddies Geoff Rickly (from Thursday) and the Used's Bert McCracken. Way's gulping, gasping whine turns stompers like "I'm Not Okay (I Promise)" into after-school poetry — perfect for pissing off your parents, carving into your binder or auditioning for summer-stock *Phantom of the Opera*.
ANDY GREENWALD

DOWNLOAD THESE "I'm Not Okay (I Promise)," "Helena," "The Ghost of You"

THE NOTORIOUS CHERRY BOMBS

THE NOTORIOUS CHERRY BOMBS ✪✪✪✪

UNIVERSAL SOUTH

Middle-aged Nashville pals reunite, put the word *hiney* in a country song

Back in '70s Nashville, the principals of this supergroup minted a way to think traditionally yet seize the contemporary, rescuing country music for modern conditions. They made up Emmylou Harris's Hot Band, but when it came to roots music, they couldn't match her unwaveringly straight face — so singers Rodney Crowell and Vince Gill and pianist Tony Brown formed the Cherry Bombs, then went on to solo and production stardom. Along with five like-minded honchos, their reunion is thoroughly casual, with Crowell and Gill's shiftingly liquid tenors lending a Traveling Wilburys whiff. "If I Ever Break Your Heart" is '70s Southern-groove magic, "Heart of a Jealous Man" goes serioso and "It's Hard to Kiss the Lips at Night That Chew Your Ass Out All Day Long" is demented honky-tonk. The album is a deceptively laid-back brief against crankiness and stupidity from Nashville cultural rebels who stayed out of jail.
JAMES HUNTER

DOWNLOAD THESE "If I Ever Break Your Heart," "Oklahoma Dust," "Wait a Minute"

OLD 97's

DRAG IT UP ✪✪✪

NEW WEST

Alt-country stalwarts need a refresher course in eighth-grade English

Alt-country, Old 97's-style, is like Thanksgiving dinner without the turkey. All the trimmings are here: lanky, shuffling rhythms, twang-loving twin guitars, expert flourishes like pedal steel and backward piano, vocals full of ragged-edged sincerity. But the songs don't have meat on their bones. On their sixth album, the Texas combo strings together images that never add up to cohesive narratives. "Won't Be Home" is about a fight in a car, but the language is so vague that it's impossible to know who is fighting or why. "In the Satellite Rides a Star" has a haunting melody that Neil Young was going to think up next week, but the lyrics are impenetrable: "Ain't a good woman who rolls out of sight/When she could honestly stay a while." Impressionism is one thing, but songs without meaning — even pretty ones — won't satisfy a hungry listener.
KAREN SCHOEMER

DOWNLOAD THIS "Moonlight"

OTEP

HOUSE OF SECRETS ✪✪

CAPITOL

Second disc of shouty thrash from Marilyn Manson–approved metal chick

Women like Amy Lee are remaking heavy metal, but Otep, the bellowing frontwoman of this Los Angeles foursome, just wants to excorcise some demons. The results are stunning, but not always in a good way. "Warhead," an attack on the Bush administration ➔

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The Polyphonic Spree: 22 musicians, one Porta Potti

("False Gods, death squads — blind!"), is a blurry combo of superfast guitar shred, pummeling drums (courtesy of Slipknot's Joey Jordison) and Otep's masculine, mostly unintelligible roar. There are moments of relief: The title track opens quietly with a coarse, syncopated guitar lick, brushed drums and Otep's soulful recounting of life as a teenage girl. Her voice, when it leaps from whisper to whine to scream, lends walloping tracks such as "Spesis" some much-needed texture. If only it also lent them much-needed melody.

NICK CATUCCI

DOWNLOAD THIS "House of Secrets"

PHISH

UNDERMIND ✪✪✪

ELEKTRA

Beloved Vermont jam kings finally write a record to enchant the Hacky Sack–impaired

To Dead or not to Dead? That is the elephant-in-the-living-room question haunting Phish's 11 studio albums. Sometimes they avoid copping anything reminiscent of the Grateful Dead, and sometimes they recognize that the influence is inescapable. There's more than a touch of the Dead's late-innings hit "Touch of Grey" on this pleasant and varied record, released just before Phish announced their dissolution. The scooting, sunny rhythm of "The Connection" might be a response to that survival-minded road ramble, and other selections employ the mass-choir harmonies that the Dead blended to prayerful effect circa *Workingman's Dead*. These insider winks and passing references keep the album buoyant, almost carefree. But only almost: In Phish tradition, the ballads are clunky and ponderous. The groove stuff, though — from the scratchy reggae title track to the heli-coptering guitar frenzy of "A Song I Heard the Ocean Sing" to "Crowd Control," which might be interpreted as a rare political call to action — exists in that blissy stratosphere the Dead visited so often, the delicate zone where no matter how intense the rhythm is, everything soars with a feathery grace.

TOM MOON

DOWNLOAD THESE "Crowd Control," "Undermind"

I LOVE THIS CD!

DAVID ARQUETTE
ACTOR IN *EIGHT LEGGED FREAKS*

G-UNIT
BEG FOR MERCY
G-UNIT/INTERSCOPE

"Certain rap makes you feel tough. When you have to flick someone off while driving, draw from that G-Unit place."

THE POLYPHONIC SPREE

TOGETHER WE'RE HEAVY ✪✪✪

HOLLYWOOD

On their second album, choir-robed Texans whip up a holy-roller symphony

Can rock theater really rock? Tim DeLaughter — a sweet-tempered Texas loony tune and the former singer for psychedelic popsters Tripping Daisy — gives it a go here. He's joined by nearly two dozen (!) devoutly robed bandmates who might

From top: Danny Clinch; Sara De Boer/Retna Ltd.

as well be bug-eyed escapees from an Up With People convention. The feel-good vibe is hard-won, though, as many of the songs are about transcending everyday despair. This gospel orchestra's 2002 debut was, effectively, a densely ambitious demo tape, but this follow-up benefits from a fatter recording budget, with swooping symphonic arrangements and dazzling melodies. "You gotta be 2,000 places at once," DeLaughter declares, and sometimes this music sounds as though it's ready to scatter in that many directions, only to unify around a startling moment of beauty like the wordless vocal that opens "Suitcase Calling" or the long, elegantly dissonant fade of "We Sound Amazed." Can we get an amen?

GREG KOT

DOWNLOAD THESE "Section 11 (We Sound Amazed)," "Section 17 (Suitcase Calling)," "Section 19 (When the Fool Becomes a King)"

THE ROGERS SISTERS

THREE FINGERS ✪✪✪

TROUBLEMAN UNLIMITED

Vigorous party-rock mini-album from one of New York's frothiest live bands

The Rogers Sisters' name is misleading. It conjures images of retro girl groups with bouffant hairdos, winged eyeliner and periwinkle cocktail dresses, not the hard-rocking, rump-shaking, mixed-gender New Wave revivalists they actually are. Jennifer and Laura Rogers (plus shouty, bass-wielding co-frontman Miyuki Furtado) take the lurchy, ricocheting dynamic devised by B-52's and Talking Heads and give it a powerful, fresh punch. "Freight Elevator" opens like Kim Wilde's "Kids in America," then explodes into plunging power chords and frenetic, loopy angles; "Five Months" is pretty and minimal, while "Fantasies Are Nice" suggests Romeo Void's off-kilter '80s classic "Never Say Never" in a beehive. Listening to *Three Fingers* is like walking on one of those funhouse floors that keeps tipping underfoot: unpredictable, destabilizing and stupidly, terrifically enjoyable.

APRIL LONG

DOWNLOAD THESE "Check Level," "Freight Elevator," "Fantasies Are Nice"

Sahara Hotnights: "Where *are* we?"

Courtesy of RCA

SAHARA HOTNIGHTS

KISS & TELL ✪✪✪

RCA

Swedish pop-punk babes break hearts, bitch about their sex lives

Rightly or not, girl bands often lead with their looks, and the comely Swedish lasses of Sahara Hotnights are no exception. Thankfully, their third record flaunts their va-va-voom and their depth. On the seductive, pop-punk "Empty Heart," guitars and keyboards jump around and nag for attention while lead singer Maria Andersson exudes come-hither charisma and palpable angst. An aura of sexual frustration hangs thick in the air, giving even the lesser moments here resonance. Andersson stockpiles her most bracing, vulnerable performances toward the end of the disc: "Keep Calling My Baby" and "Stay/Stay Away" prove definitively that even hot chicks can get the blues.

ASTONISHING FACT! >>

THE ROGERS SISTERS recorded and mixed their first album, *Purely Evil*, in less than 36 hours, doing all of the basic instrument tracks in one take.

TIM GRIERSON

DOWNLOAD THESE "Keep Calling My Baby," "The Difference Between Love and Hell"

ERICK SERMON

CHILLTOWN, NY ✪✪✪

DEF SQUAD

Rap stalwart proves his prowess — and bids for the charts — yet again

Hip-hop elders are too rarely honored, but Erick Sermon, one half of old-school greats EPMD, actually gets dissed: He's been plagued by press rumors that he's gay and that he tried to kill himself in 2001, and his impressive production credits (including Jay-Z and Mary J. Blige) have yet to earn him a video cameo. His fifth album teeters between boasts of his success and rebuffs of a bling fixation, delivered with a throaty, forceful matter-of-factness. While none of these spare summer jams of knotty beats match his Marvin Gaye–sampling 2001 hit "Music," almost any would freshen radio: "Chillin"

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and "I'm Not Him" weave in spellbinding vocal samples for hooks, and the rolling, melodic bass line on "Relentless" warms like the classic '90s underground sound he started with.
NICK CATUCCI
DOWNLOAD THESE "Relentless," "Chillin"

SLOAN

ACTION PACT ✪✪✪

KOCH

Beloved Canadian power-poppers locate the AM soul of FM rock on seventh album

Some bands think it's OK to interpolate '70s and '80s metal only if they're ironic; others believe that only unfettered devotion to the unitard can make big riffs work. With every shivery-sweet Black Sabbath guitar riff and every spine-rattling AC/DC drum fill on *Action Pact*, Sloan strike the right balance between earnestness and goofiness without straying too far from their power-pop roots. The sugar-and-sulfur harmonies on "Gimme That" and the firestorm guitars on "Hollow Head" are made to be turned up loud, but Sloan aren't afraid to ask the quieter questions: "We could talk on the phone some/But I'd rather we kissed," singer Jay Ferguson suggests on "Ready for You." Even when Sloan beckon us to cum on feel the noize, they still know a place where we can go.
STEPHANIE ZACHAREK
DOWNLOAD THESE "The Rest of My Life," "Hollow Head"

SQUAD FIVE-0

LATE NEWS BREAKING ✪✪

CAPITOL

Savannah, Georgia, punk-pop quintet lose their religion, find a stack of Rancid records

Products of the Christian-punk underground, Squad Five-0 learned from the success of closeted Christian-rock comers Evanescence and P.O.D., and kicked Jesus shout-outs to the curb for their major-label debut. But these young lambs also found themselves a new God: His name is Tim Armstrong. The Rancid frontman's influence looms ridiculously large here, from the stuttering guitar riffs that ch-ch-ch-churn through "Lay It Down" to singer John Fortson's mealy-mouthed drawl on "All We Have." Amid the slight tunes and perfunctory props to booze and the proletariat, the 2-Tone ska touches are jaunty and the hooks memorable, if for no other reason than they were yanked wholesale from Rancid's . . . *And Out Come the Wolves*.
DAVID PEISNER
DOWNLOAD THESE "2 Grand and a Lot of Hassle," "Train of Shame"

Angie Stone returns from her vacation in Panama.

ANGIE STONE

STONE LOVE ✪✪✪✪

J RECORDS

D'Angelo's ex takes a calm approach to soul ecstasy

You can scarcely have R&B without drama, but old-school singers often ruin their worthy tributes by overdoing it. Trying to compete with classic Aretha Franklin records, they apply their retro zeal with the same force they'd use to bounce some cad and end up sounding batty, like insane pottery collectors or *Star Wars* conventioneers. This is decidedly not so with Angie Stone on her third album. For this South Carolina native, classicism yields all the right stuff: alert sound with a lived-in feel, finely detailed tunes that shoot straight. On lasting jams such as "I Wanna Thank Ya," with Snoop Dogg, or "U-Haul" — a mature Missy Elliott production with baroque choral work whose you-should-lose-that-man funkiness is exhilarating — Stone's singing is grounded and gorgeous. It's her specialty, and R&B needs it.
JAMES HUNTER
DOWNLOAD THESE "Come Live with Me," "U-Haul," "My Man"

ASTONISHING FACT! >>
ANGIE STONE played saxophone in Lenny Kravitz's band, and when she was 20 years old, she was in a rap trio called the Sequence.

THELONIOUS MONSTER

CALIFORNIA CLAM CHOWDER ✪✪✪✪

LAKESHORE

Notoriously drunken L.A. scenester punks sober up on moving fifth album

Bob Forrest has the ultimate indie-rock voice. Pinched and perspiring sincerity, it isn't pretty or commercial, and it doesn't hide depths beneath its surface — it's all surface. His band formed 20 years ago, and after a 10-year hiatus, they've continued making swell punk rock, ragged and literate enough to bare the truth about Forrest: He's a great Southern California singer-songwriter (like the late Warren Zevon) in ripped clothing. Every song here makes reference to a musician in its title, usually because of a nicked musical cue: "The Curtis Mayfield Song" is a sweet, righteously soulful tune about the dangers of the music industry; "The Bob Dylan Song" is a bravely sincere post-Columbine hymn for high-school weirdos everywhere. No matter whose name is dropped, though, each song is unmistakably Forrest's, a teardrop hanging off his best lines.
RJ SMITH
DOWNLOAD THESE "The Bob Dylan Song," "The Thelonious Monster Song," "The Rolling Stones '77 Song"

THEY MIGHT BE GIANTS

THE SPINE ✪✪✪

IDLEWILD/ROUNDER/UNIVERSAL

Brooklyn duo's tenth album delivers slightly more hits than misses

Like *Seinfeld*, TMBG albums tend to be about nothing; unlike *Seinfeld*, that's not always a plus. Musically, this embrace of singable non sequiturs allows the Giants to chase down any random inspiration, be it weirdo electronica (the creepy "Bastard Wants to Hit Me"), brass-band vaudeville (the cartoony "Stalk of Wheat") or everything-plus-the-kitchen-sink pop (the strangely addictive "It's Kicking In"). Too often, though, their ideas are dead ends, which can lead to such pointless exercises as "Au Contraire," which name-drops Gandhi, FDR and David Bowie without making any connection between them. Luckily, the good outweighs the bad — the sing-along-catchy "Prevenge" ranks among their best — but not by as much as on 1994's *John Henry*. Their much-vaunted wit and inventiveness might be running down.
J.D. CONSIDINE
DOWNLOAD THIS "Prevenge"

VARIOUS ARTISTS

ROCK AGAINST BUSH VOL. 1 ✪✪✪

FAT WRECK CHORDS

Punk all-stars aim their sights at the White House

Punk rock — like comic books, baseball and summer action movies — is best when it has a larger-than-life villain ➔

I LOVE THIS CD!

KATE HUDSON
ACTRESS IN *RAISING HELEN*

THE POLYPHONIC SPREE
THE BEGINNING STAGES OF . . . *GOOD*

"My husband is a well-spring of music, and he discovered their CD almost a year ago."

From top: Courtesy of J Records; Sara De Boer/Retna Ltd.

Scissor Sisters would come to regret challenging G-Unit to a turf war.

HOT TRICKS

Astounding debut from sexy NYC fashion plates

SCISSOR SISTERS

SCISSOR SISTERS

★★★★

UNIVERSAL

THEY DRESS IN bi-curious thrift-store tat and are named after a lesbian sex position. They've got silly names (Baby Daddy, Ana Matronic, Paddy Boom, etc.), four out of five of them are men and — yes, you worked it out — they aren't sisters. You'd imagine that the Scissor Sisters deal in aggressive performance-installation rock. Instead, this is a world-class disco-pop outfit who resemble the Bee Gees, Supertramp and 10cc, all at their best, all at the same time.

More than anything, Scissor Sisters sound like a science-fiction Elton John from back when he made boogie-ing party records instead of overripe ballads. There's a rare feel-good accessibility that alchemizes their raw materials — the flotsam and jetsam of half-remembered '70s and '80s pop radio — and makes them new. Handled with less love, this could feel like a smug wander through an ironic record collection. Here, it becomes sexy, life-affirming pop.

If they're a fashion band, they don't act like one: Scissor Sisters cast aside notions of cool, making this possibly the least uptight album ever made. "Laura" opens with vamping pianos and the return, after two decades' exile, of the crazed, wind-in-the-hair saxophone solo. "Take Your Mama Out" adds yet more rollicking piano; by track three they're erecting a swirling glitterball above Pink Floyd's "Comfortably Numb" and turning it into a disco workout complete with scrotum-clenching male falsetto in the Gibb Brothers mold.

A combination of invention and humor (singer Jake Shears enlivens "Laura" with a Michael Jackson-ish "Chamone!") carries them forward irresistibly. The Sisters' traditional, even comforting songwriting gets to borrow some of the mind-emptying joy of the dance floor, and everyone goes home happy.

Subject-wise, we're in an updated Warholian demimonde, home to the freak, the transvestite and the "lovey-dovey ghetto princess," but it's an upbeat version where dreams can come true. Even on "Return to Oz," which tots up the damage crystal meth has done to gay men in New York, there's hope to be found somewhere, even if it's only over the rainbow. Scissor Sisters are too in love with pop to let the dirt rub off on them, and this spectacular debut might make you feel invincible, too. *ANDREW HARRISON*

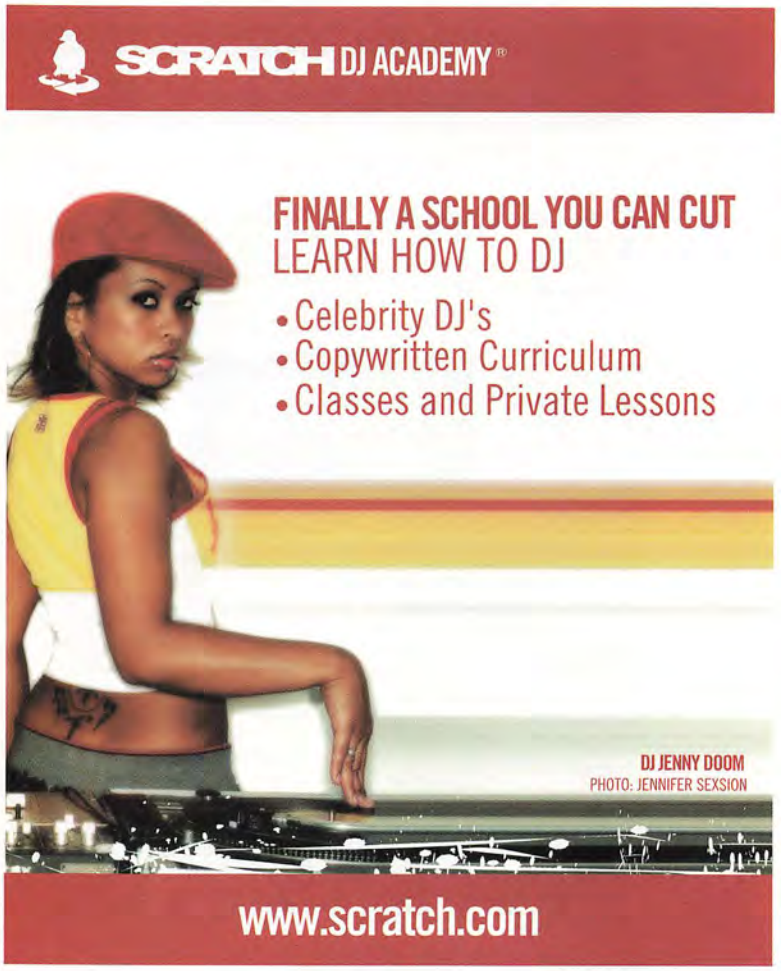
DOWNLOAD THESE "Tits on the Radio," "Take Your Mama Out," "Laura"

JAKE SHEARS'S CURRENT LISTENING

>> **PAUL WILLIAMS** HERE COMES INSPIRATION *POLYGRAM*

>> **PHIL MANZANERA** DIAMOND HEAD *EXPRESSION*

Joseph Cultice. On Matronic: Leather skirt by Izzy; fur stole by Charles Chang-Lima; shoes by Cesare Paciotti; brooch by Noir NYC; gloves by La Crasia. On Shears: Jeans by Judy Rosen @ The Good, the Bad & the Ugly NYC; shirt by D&G. On Baby Daddy: Suit by Moschino; shirt by Morgan D'ellasandro; shoes by Cesare Paciotti; belt by Alexandre Herschovitz; belt as necklace by Jean-Paul Gaultier. On Marquis: leather jacket by Cloak. On Boom: Pants and belt by J. Lindberg; T-shirt by Grail; vest by Roman Kapadia



Uncle Kracker: "I've got *what* growing out of my head?"

STAG PARTY

Kid Rock's homey is OK as a softie, lame when he acts hard

UNCLE KRACKER

SEVENTY TWO & SUNNY ✪✪

LAVA

>> SURE, HE'S FAMILY, but just what kind of uncle is Matt Shafer, a.k.a. Uncle Kracker? On *Seventy Two & Sunny*, he can be the kindly uncle, a pensive coot hanging out on the porch with the dawgs, watching the sun set. But get a few drinks in him and he turns into a brawling, Nascar-loving hillbilly peckerwood who best not be crossed: Uncle Sam on a bad day. The third CD from Kid Rock's former DJ shows him to be a good soul when he's aiming for lady-friendly hits, but when he starts bragging and snarling, you wish he was an uncle once removed.

> He turns into a brawling hillbilly peckerwood.

Shafer grew up in Clawson, Michigan, and like many Michigan rockers, he arrived with a Southern pedigree. That's because back in the '20s and '30s, thousands of whites and blacks moved North to work in auto factories. Since then, Michigan folks from Bob Seger to Jack White to Bob Ritchie have had a country accent and a rebel streak in 'em.

Still, Kracker's Southernisms feel a little rote and undigested. He mixes acoustic guitars and electric boogie, "soulful" vocals (too many cigarettes) and fiddles and cameos from bona fide country stars: On "Last Night Again" he duets with Kenny Chesney (Chesney's cameo is only fair, since Kracker dropped by to duet with Chesney on his Top 10 country smash "When the Sun Goes Down").

"A Place at My Table" is watered-down Charlie Daniels stuff, a fiddle-driven hoedown in which Kracker pays tribute to his purported influences: Motown, George Jones and Patsy Cline. Elsewhere, would-be loner lyrics fall flat ("Don't go trying to change me, baby, 'cause you can't save me," he says on "Blues Man"), while the double-negative crazed "Don't Know How (Not to Love You)" isn't not one of the worst things here.

What Kracker really does best is craft smart, shallow summer songs — catchy fare for the beach à la Sugar Ray. "Rescue," the first single, should be another hit like his 2001 single "Follow Me" and his cover of "Drift Away": It's written by bonded hitmaker Diane Warren and sounds like a bazillion bucks. Cue the sing-along chorus, and get ready to say "uncle." *RJ SMITH*

DOWNLOAD THESE None

UNCLE KRACKER'S CURRENT LISTENING

>> **JERRY JEFF WALKER** COWBOY BOOTS & BATHIN' SUITS *TRIED & TRUE*

>> **JERRY JEFF WALKER** VIVA TERLINGUA *MCA*

to rail against. And for NOFX's suddenly opinionated guitarist Fat Mike, George W. Bush is Lex Luthor, the New York Yankees and the *Titanic*-wrecking iceberg rolled into one. For his new Web site (punkvoter.com) and now this compilation, Fat Mike has put his Rolodex to use, uniting disparate bands for a common goal: making sure Bush doesn't get a second term. The usually goth Alkaline Trio contribute the best original song here, an anthemic polemic called "Warbrain," but other bands you wouldn't peg for *New Republic* subscribers also impress, including New Found Glory, Sum 41 and Ministry. Best of all, the CD is packaged with a DVD featuring documentaries, videos and even some choice David Cross standup. It's the mohawks vs. the Iraq hawks! *ANDY GREENWALD*

DOWNLOAD THESE Alkaline Trio, "Warbrain"; Sum 41, "Moron"; Strike Anywhere, "To the World"

VAST AIRE

LOOK MOM . . . NO HANDS ✪✪✪

CHOCOLATE INDUSTRIES

In sci-fi-loving MC's solo debut, the Silver Surfer saves Harlem World

Vast Aire brings the Pillsbury Doughboy to mind, and not just because he's chubby — all convex vowels and round, inviting timbres, his every line swells like a paunch you could poke. Not that he giggles much. As half of Cannibal Ox, Aire powered the grim *The Cold Vein*, underground rap's finest album of 2001. Here as there, he's like a heartbeat buried in a rotting digital junkyard. With A-list indies Aesop Rock, MF Doom and Madlib along, he narrates Harlem streets with grit, pathos and X-Men metaphors, softening stark descriptions of death and despair with winning dorkiness: "I got an ill flow, but you already knew that/Like the third movie of *The Matrix* was gonna be wack." Thank God for the underground, where nerds like Vast Aire finally get their shot at cockiness. *JONAH WEINER*

DOWNLOAD THESE "Candid Cam," "Why'sdaskyblue?"

Vast Aire celebrates eating Tiny Aire.

The Veils: Unhappy with their new greenhouse, evidently

THE VEILS

THE RUNAWAY FOUND ✪✪✪

ROUGH TRADE

Majestic, mournful rock debut from Brits with their heads stuck in the '70s — the 1870s!

There's a fine line between sounding passionate and overwrought, but this London-via-New Zealand four-piece find themselves on the proper side of that smudgy barrier — just. The Veils are fond of hazy guitars with big, fuzzy halos; they also favor strings that sweep, *Wuthering Heights*-style, across the moors of their more majestic songs ("The Wild Son"). It would all be patently ridiculous, if only it didn't sound so damn good: Finn Andrews takes lyrics with no right to exist outside a Georgian four-poster bed ("And our stars align in Elysian Fields at night") and somehow turns them into smoldering slogans of modern romance. His inky crooning is as addictive as laudanum, the Victorian opiate — or at least what twenty-first-century sentimentalists imagine laudanum is like. *STEPHANIE ZACHAREK*

DOWNLOAD THESE "The Wild Son," "The Tide That Left and Never Came Back"

MIKE WATT

THE SECONDMAN'S MIDDLE STAND ✪

COLUMBIA

Enduring punk-rock bassist documents a mysterious illness

This CD is what happens when bad music happens to good guys. Mike Watt, 46, is a punk-rock mensch who still wears flannel, an indie-rock cheerleader who never left his hometown of San Pedro, California. On his third solo album, the onetime member of punk geniuses the Minutemen offers a song cycle documenting a near-death bout with an unnamed disease (in real life — stop reading if you're squeamish — a burst abscess in his perineum). With an amateurish organ, drums and plenty of bass solos, *Secondman* features arty and minimal moments of pain, hallucination, cold sweat — everything but a

Clockwise from top left: Lego, courtesy of Rough Trade; courtesy of Chocolate Industries

hospital bill. Talk about too much information; just thank God that Watt didn't catch dysentery.
RJ SMITH
DOWNLOAD THESE None

BRIAN WILSON

GETTIN' IN OVER MY HEAD
✪✪

RHINO

For the Beach Boys mastermind, now 62, the endless summer seems to have ended

Only diehards — and there are a lot of them — believe Brian Wilson can still sing. In the vocal, he's labored, bombastic and pitch-challenged, far from a boy and not much of a man. It's not the cameos by Eric Clapton, Paul McCartney and Elton John that make this an improvement on 1998's atrocious *Imagination*, but the absence of schlock-rock collaborator Joe Thomas. Whether bigging up New Orleans R&B or bowing toward Nelson Riddle, Wilson's orchestrations have some juice. But from the bald I-have-survived of "How Can We Still Be Dancin'?" to the lost-fun-fun-fun of "Saturday Morning in the City," the lyrics are embarrassing. And the only time the old Beach Boys harmonies take off is the only time Wilson doesn't overdub them himself.
ROBERT CHRISTGAU
DOWNLOAD THIS "Desert Ride"

YOUNG BUCK

STRAIGHT OUTTA CASHVILLE
✪✪✪

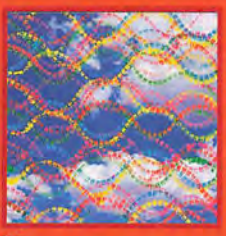
G-UNIT/INTERSCOPE

G-Unit inductee revels in success

Young Buck must think he's living in a gangsta's paradise. The 23-year-old Nashville native found instant fame when 50 Cent asked him to join G-Unit in place of the jailed Tony Yayo. His solo debut laces the Unit's thugs-to-riches formula with chunks of the Dirty South: David Banner and Lil' Flip guest on the syrupy "Welcome to the South," and producer Lil Jon dabbles in sleazy funk on "Shorty Wanna Ride." With his heavy-artillery delivery, Buck distinguishes himself by boasting and bullying over softer sounds, like swooping disco strings ("Bonafide Hustler") and a Nancy Sinatra sample grabbed from the *Kill Bill* soundtrack ("Bang Bang"). "Some say I'm crazy for signing with 50 Cent," he alleges in "Prices on My Head." Really?
NICK CATUCCI
DOWNLOAD THIS "Bang Bang"

BLENDER APPROVED

The best NEW RELEASES of the last three months

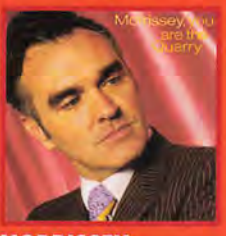


!!!
LOUDEN UP NOW
TOUCH & GO

From this Talking Heads–inspired Brooklyn seven-piece comes sexy protest funk full of dirty grooves and dirtier language.

AVRIL LAVIGNE
UNDER MY SKIN
RCA

Where she once sounded confused, the megaplatinum punkette of the north is plain pissed on her second album.

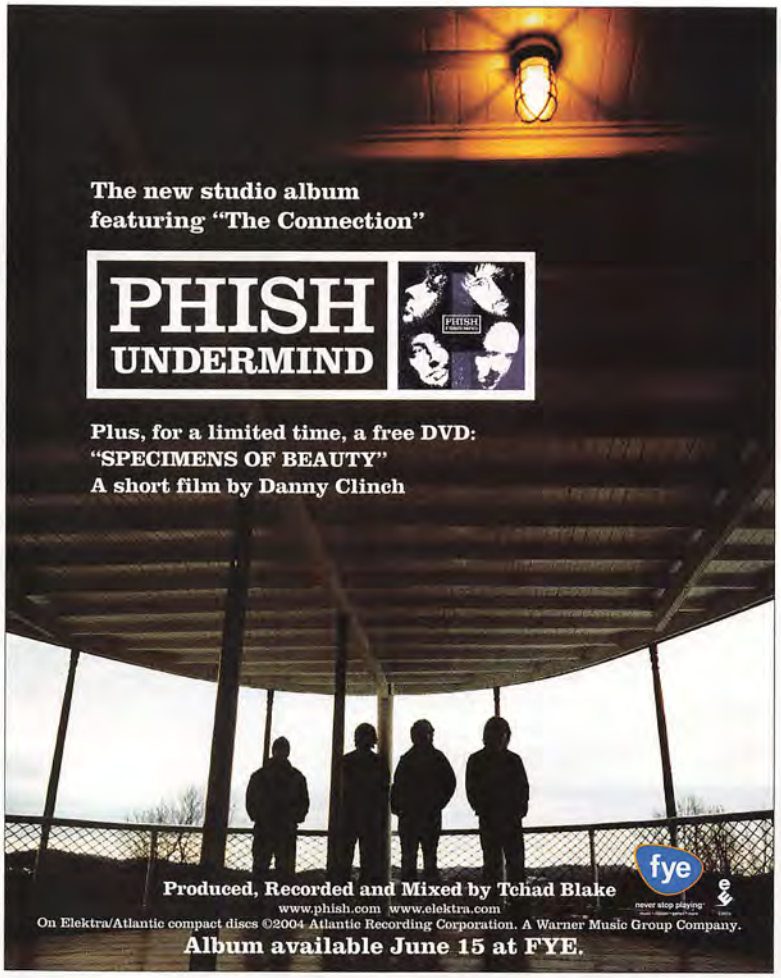


MORRISSEY
YOU ARE THE QUARRY
ATTACK/SANCTUARY

The patron saint of misery returns after seven years, still mopey as he muses on cops, lesbians — and his new Hispanic fan base!

D12
D12 WORLD
SHADY/INTERSCOPE

Eminem and his perverted homeboys poke fun at themselves and go for full-on horrorcore gross-out on their second album.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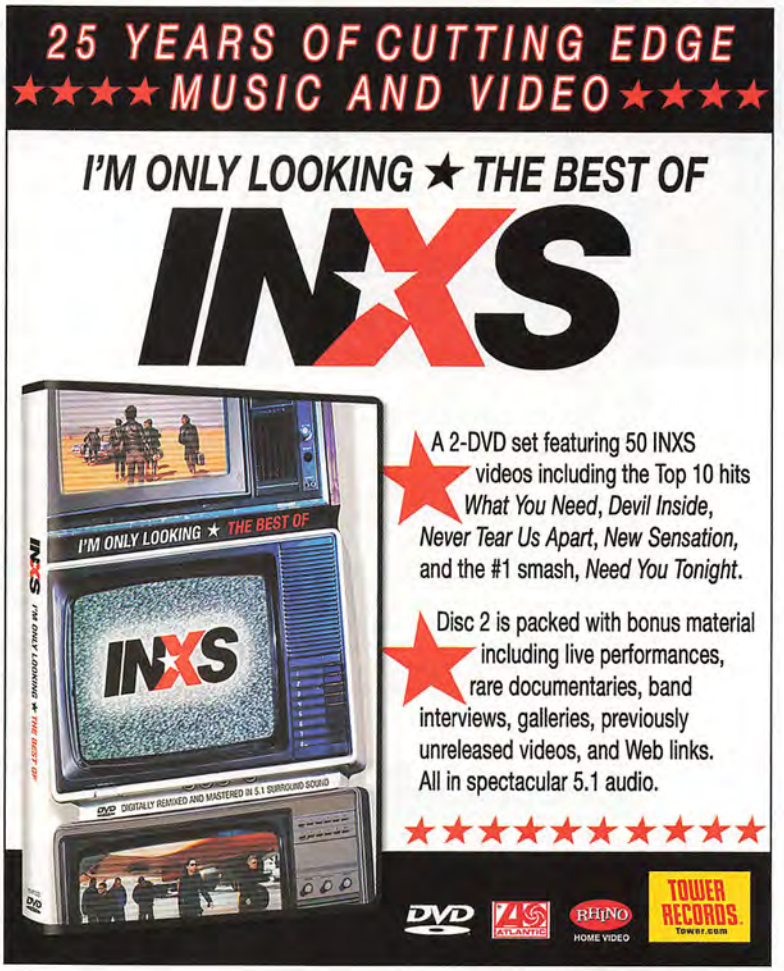
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WEEK ENDING SUNDAY, JUNE 20

THE 40 MOST POPULAR SONGS IN AMERICA

They may put the "old" in old-school, but this month the Beastie Boys rule!

POSITION	TITLE	ARTIST	ALBUM/LABEL
1	"CH-CHECK IT OUT"	BEASTIE BOYS	*TO THE 5 BOROUGHS* CAPITOL
2	"ACCIDENTALLY IN LOVE"	COUNTING CROWS	*SHREK 2 SOUNDTRACK* DREAMWORKS/GEFFEN
3	"THE REASON"	HOOBASTANK	*THE REASON* ISLAND
4	"DUALITY"	SLIPKNOT	*VOL. 3: THE SUBLIMINAL VERSES* ROADRUNNER
5	"OUR LIPS ARE SEALED"	HILARY & HAYLIE DUFF	*A CINDERELLA STORY SOUNDTRACK* HOLLYWOOD
6	"CONFESSIONS PT. 2"	USHER	*CONFESSIONS* LaFACE/ARISTA
7	"ON FIRE"	LLOYD BANKS	*HUNGER FOR MORE* G-UNIT/INTERSCOPE
8	"TIME'S UP"	JADAKISS FEAT. NATE DOGG	*KISS OF DEATH* RUFF RYDERS/INTERSCOPE
9	"THE END OF THE WORLD"	THE CURE	*THE CURE* I AM/GEFFEN
10	"JESUS WALKS"	KANYE WEST	*THE COLLEGE DROPOUT* ROC-A-FELLA/DEF JAM
11	"EVERYTIME"	BRITNEY SPEARS	*IN THE ZONE* JIVE
12	"I DON'T WANNA KNOW"	MARIO WINANS	*HURT NO MORE* BAD BOY/UNIVERSAL
13	"FLOAT ON "	MODEST MOUSE	*GOOD NEWS FOR PEOPLE WHO LOVE BAD NEWS* EPIC
14	"HEAVEN"	LOS LONELY BOYS	*LOS LONELY BOYS* OR/EPIC
15	"THIS LOVE"	MAROON 5	*SONGS ABOUT JANE* OCTONE/J RECORDS
16	"ROSES"	OUTKAST	*SPEAKERBOXXX/ THE LOVE BELOW* ARISTA
17	"VINDICATED"	DASHBOARD CONFESSIONAL	*SPIDER-MAN 2 SOUNDTRACK* COLUMBIA/SONY MUSIC SOUNDTRAX
18	"BURN"	USHER	*CONFESSIONS* LaFACE/ARISTA
19	"ANTHEM OF OUR DYING DAY"	STORY OF THE YEAR	*PAGE AVENUE* MAVERICK
20	"LOVE SONG"	311	*GREATEST HITS '93–'03* VOLCANO
21	"OVERNIGHT CELEBRITY"	TWISTA	*KAMIKAZE* ATLANTIC
22	"TAKE ME OUT"	FRANZ FERDINAND	*FRANZ FERDINAND* EPIC
23	"NAUGHTY GIRL"	BEYONCÉ	*DANGEROUSLY IN LOVE* COLUMBIA
24	"SLITHER"	VELVET REVOLVER	*CONTRABAND* RCA
25	"I MISS YOU"	BLINK-182	*BLINK-182* GEFFEN
26	"HEY MAMA"	THE BLACK EYED PEAS	*ELEPHUNK* A&M
27	"OCEAN AVENUE"	YELLOWCARD	*OCEAN AVENUE* CAPITOL
28	"TAKE MY BREATH AWAY"	JESSICA SIMPSON	*IN THIS SKIN* COLUMBIA
29	"MY BAND"	D12	*D12 WORLD* SHADY/INTERSCOPE
30	"DIRT OFF YOUR SHOULDER"	JAY-Z	*THE BLACK ALBUM* ROC-A-FELLA/DEF JAM
31	"IRISH BLOOD, ENGLISH HEART"	MORRISSEY	*YOU ARE THE QUARRY* ATTACK/SANCTUARY
32	"LEAVE (GET OUT)"	JOJO	*JOJO* UNIVERSAL
33	"MEANT TO LIVE"	SWITCHFOOT	*THE BEAUTIFUL LETDOWN* COLUMBIA
34	"YEAH!"	USHER	*CONFESSIONS* LaFACE/ARISTA
35	"JUST LIKE YOU"	THREE DAYS GRACE	*THREE DAYS GRACE* JIVE
36	"SO COLD"	BREAKING BENJAMIN	*WE ARE NOT ALONE* HOLLYWOOD
37	"DON'T SAY NUTHIN"	THE ROOTS	*THE TIPPING POINT* GEFFEN
38	"DOWN"	BLINK-182	*BLINK-182* GEFFEN
39	"SUNRISE"	NORAH JONES	*FEELS LIKE HOME* BLUE NOTE
40	"CURBSIDE PROPHET"	JASON MRAZ	*TONIGHT, NOT AGAIN* ELEKTRA

1 BEASTIE BOYS
"CH-CHECK IT OUT"
TO THE 5 BOROUGHS

Until Eminem, the Beastie Boys were the only white rappers worth their mics. Now, on their first album since 1998's four-times-platinum *Hello Nasty*, they're the only white rappers worth their mics who also have graying hair! The video for this old-school throwback was the number 1 most-played on MTV last month, when they shared a bill with the Strokes at New York City rock radio behemoth K-ROCK's Dysfunctional Family Picnic. This August, they'll play one-off dates throughout the country.

HOW WE DID IT
HITS daily double

The Most Popular Songs chart is based on radio and video airplay and album sales. Provided by HITSDailyDouble.com: "Proof that any idiot in the music business can have a Web site."

4 SLIPKNOT
"DUALITY"
VOL. 3: THE SUBLIMINAL VERSES

Could it be that without the creepshow masks and blood-red jumpsuits, Slipknot would look like the dudes working at your local Burger King? The nü-metal troupe headline Ozzfest's second stage this summer, dropping in on Jay Leno, Jimmy Kimmel and Conan O'Brien along the way.

8 JADAKISS
"TIME'S UP"
KISS OF DEATH

He's DMX-approved, J.Lo loves him and Jay-Z can't stand him. This Yonkers, New York, MC is a street favorite, but Nate Dogg polishes him up with some fancy warbling on this comeback single. Last month, he rocked the crowd alongside Lil Jon and Big Boi at hip-hop's annual A-list blowout, Summer Jam.

20 311
"LOVE SONG"
GREATEST HITS '93–'03

Give these reggae-metallers credit: They've been floating in a dope haze for a decade and still managed to pump out hits the whole time. This one, a Cure cover, comes from the *50 First Dates* soundtrack. Last month they played it for Jay Leno, and next month they kick off a national tour.

THE 10 MOST POPULAR RING TONES IN AMERICA

Your call is important to us — and also to the bank balances of Usher, D12 and Jay-Z

1. OVERNIGHT CELEBRITY	TWISTA
2. RUBBER BAND MAN	T.I.
3. TIPSY	J-KWON
4. BURN	USHER
5. DIRT OFF YOUR SHOULDER	JAY-Z
6. SLOW JAMZ	TWISTA
7. PINK PANTHER	THEME
8. UNCLE F**KA	SOUTH PARK
9. MY BAND	D12
10. SPLASH WATERFALLS	LUDACRIS

SOURCE: VIRGIN MOBILE

Clockwise from top right: Neil Zlozower; Anthony Cutajar; Allison Dyer; Thomas Rabsch/Idols

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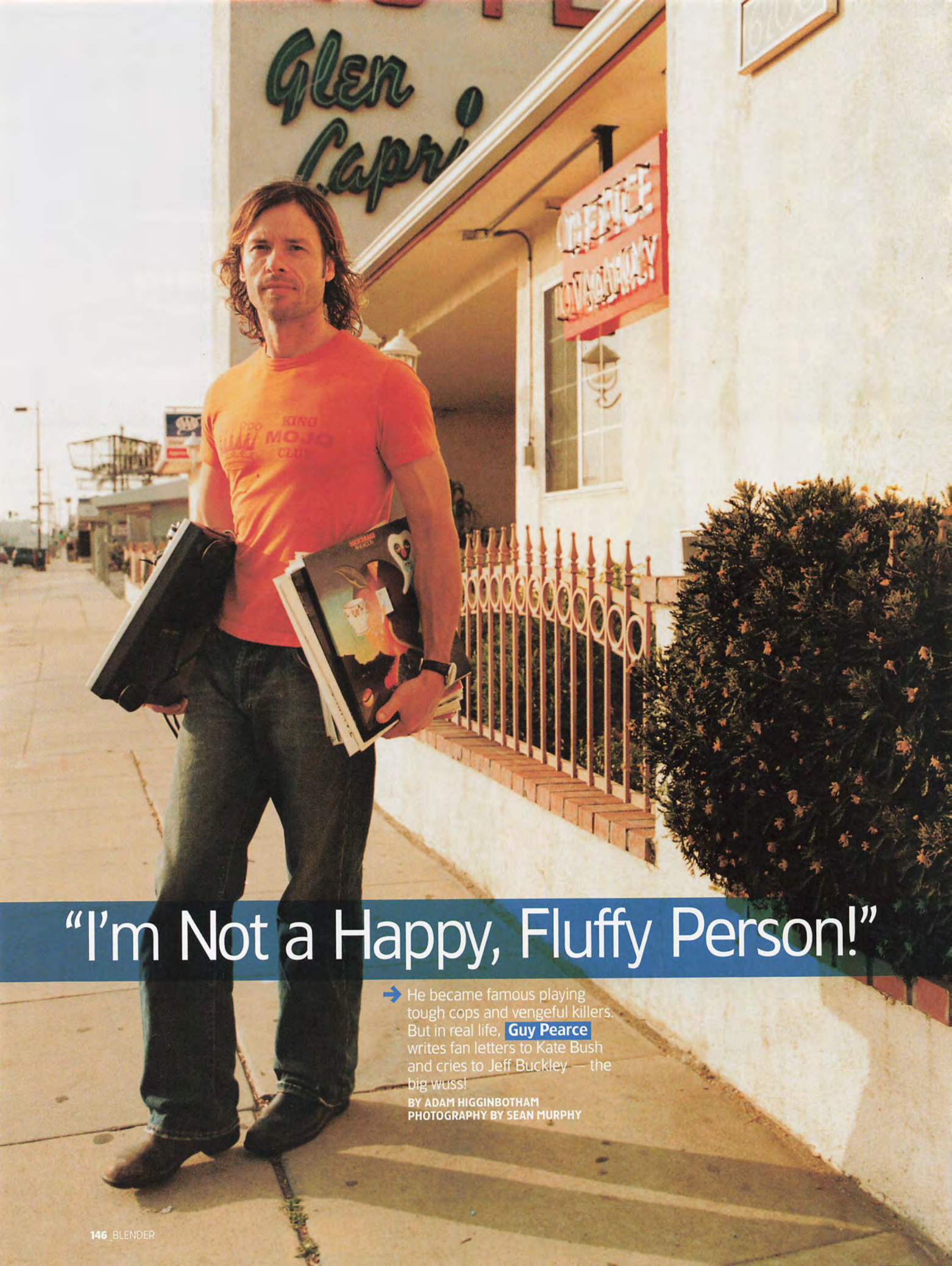


"I'm Not a Happy, Fluffy Person!"

He became famous playing tough cops and vengeful killers. But in real life, **Guy Pearce** writes fan letters to Kate Bush and cries to Jeff Buckley — the big wuss!

BY ADAM HIGGINBOTHAM
PHOTOGRAPHY BY SEAN MURPHY

STANDING AT A bus stop on a bright, hot day in Burbank, California, Guy Pearce gazes up the street and then begins removing his shirt. The sight of an internationally recognized movie star casually stripping to the waist on the sidewalk might be expected to attract some attention — especially here, where Pearce spent three weeks filming the back-to-front amnesia murder mystery *Memento*. But no: The chubby man waiting for a bus continues to stare into space; the traffic zips past. Pearce selects a new shirt from his backpack, puts it on and prepares to have his picture taken.

With his roles in *Memento* and *L.A. Confidential* — and now as the rugged explorer in *Two Brothers* and the aspiring rock star in *A Slipping-Down Life* — Pearce, 36, has specialized in buff, moody leading men. But the naturalized Australian cut his teeth on musicals. "*The King and I, Fiddler on the Roof* — I've done the lot," he says. He has also been writing and recording his own songs since he was in school. He says the musical exploits of fellow Australian Russell Crowe haven't discouraged him from telling people about his own songwriting. "But," he explains carefully, "I'm certainly discouraged in taking it public."

Who does he sound like? Jeff Buckley. At least he hopes so. "I can relate to him as a person. In many ways we're very similar. We sing on the same kind of range. If I was to really get out there and do it, that's what I would want to be able to do."

If his album choices seem a little, well, miserable, that wouldn't be entirely inaccurate. "I'm not," he admits, "a shiny, happy, fluffy person."

THE BEATLES

LET IT BE

CAPITOL, 1970

"My dad saw the Beatles at the Cavern in Liverpool. He was a squadron leader in the Air Force and liked a bit of drinking and partying. He died when I was 8. Those Beatles albums that Mum and Dad had at home had a really great effect on my life, on my perception of music. I used to sit there and play the things and just spin out."

JEFF BUCKLEY

GRACE

COLUMBIA, 1994

"A lot of the music I like can become very theatrical — very emotional and rollercoaster-ish. I might cry to this if I ever sing along with it. I'll go through phases with it, when I feel I've got emotional stuff I need to express — all sorts of emotional stuff that's never been resolved because of my dad that I'm very keen to have come to the surface."

TALKING HEADS

STOP MAKING SENSE

WARNER BROS., 1984

"Whenever I listen to Talking Heads, it reminds me of knowing I was going to be leaving school: very happy. It was a bit of a toffy private school, and all my young life was about learning to act: by trying to make out to people that I was with what they were on about, to keep them happy so I wouldn't be bullied."

KATE BUSH

HOUNDS OF LOVE

EMI AMERICA, 1985

"Listening to *Hounds of Love* reminds me of moving out of home. I'd just turned 18 and got the job on *Neighbours*, an evening soap opera that was on in Australia, Monday to Friday. I'm the hugest Kate Bush fan in the world. I thought about writing to her for many years but in the end decided not to. I wrote to the fan magazine instead."

JONI MITCHELL

BLUE

REPRISE, 1971

"I don't listen to this very often, but it's one of those where if I know I want to be sad, I'll put it on. It's so melancholic: very fucking sad. I'll take it with me sometimes, and if I'm missing my wife and really want to delve into thinking about what she means to me and how much I love her — this takes me straight into it."

NICK DRAKE

PINK MOON

ISLAND, 1972

"I was wondering — should I chuck some light stuff in? Because people are always saying, 'Don't let Guy put the music on!' Sometimes people want lighter stuff — ambient background music. I listen to Nick Drake as melancholy background. If I want background music I can connect to a little bit, I'll put him on."

SILVERCHAIR

DIORAMA

ATLANTIC, 2002

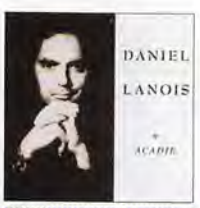
"It's not at all because I'm in one of their videos that I've chosen this. Daniel Johns, the singer, is a genius. He was 15 when they made their first record. His voice is extraordinary — he's got the devil in there like a 15-year-old kid shouldn't have. I wrote to him after this came out just to say, 'You rock, mate.' "

COCTEAU TWINS

BLUE BELL KNOLL

4AD, 1988

"My real attraction to music isn't through lyrics or poetry — it's through what music can do for you. I love their tone and sounds: twisted, obscure, melancholic. All of them together, with Liz Fraser's voice, sound like this odd instrument. I can't understand what they're singing about."



DANIEL LANOIS

ACADIE

WARNER BROS., 1989

"Lanois has a really rich, beautiful voice — very romantic. It's one of the first things I'll play when I get to a new place, one of those albums I'll want to have with me in case I'll be feeling down and I don't want to be — on those rare occasions. If that's on, then everything feels safe and calm and familiar."

KEITH JARRETT

THE KÖLN CONCERT

ECM, 1975

"This goes back a long way, to when I was in school having saxophone lessons. It's a real security blanket for me. I've played it so often that I know it back to front; I can sing every note. It's live, so you can hear the audience, and I've learned every sound and cough and splutter as well."

AND MORE . . .

TORI AMOS LITTLE EARTHQUAKES **TORI AMOS** UNDER THE PINK **FIONA APPLE** TIDAL **AUDIOSLAVE** AUDIOSLAVE **THE BEATLES** RARITIES **BECK** SEA CHANGE **BJÖRK** DEBUT **DAVID BOWIE** CHANGESBOWIE **DAVID BOWIE** HOURS **DAVID BRIDIE** HOTEL RADIO **SAM BROWN** STOP **JEFF BUCKLEY** LIVE AT L'OLYMPIA **JEFF BUCKLEY** LIVE AT SIN-É **JEFF BUCKLEY** MYSTERY WHITE BOY **JEFF BUCKLEY** SKETCHES FOR MY SWEETHEART THE DRUNK **KATE BUSH** THE DREAMING **KATE BUSH** THE KICK INSIDE **KATE BUSH** LIONHEART **KATE BUSH** NEVER FOR EVER **KATE BUSH** THE RED SHOES **JOHN CALE** FRAGMENTS OF A RAINY SEASON **NICK CAVE** THE BOATMAN'S CALL **NICK CAVE** NOCTURAMA **NICK CAVE** NO MORE SHALL WE PART **TONI CHILDS** UNION **COCTEAU TWINS** GARLANDS **COCTEAU TWINS** HEAVEN OR LAS VEGAS **COCTEAU TWINS** MILK & KISSES **THE DISSOCIATIVES** THE DISSOCIATIVES **NICK DRAKE** TIME OF NO REPLY **BOB DYLAN** BLOOD ON THE TRACKS **ELECTRIC LIGHT ORCHESTRA** TIME **EMINEM** THE EMINEM SHOW **FAITH NO MORE** KING FOR A DAY, FOOL FOR A LIFETIME **FLEETWOOD MAC** RUMOURS **FLEETWOOD MAC** TANGO IN THE NIGHT **FLEETWOOD MAC** TUSK **PETER GABRIEL** 1 **PETER GABRIEL** 2 **PETER GABRIEL** 3 **PETER GABRIEL** SECURITY **PETER GABRIEL** PASSION **PETER GABRIEL** SO **PETER GABRIEL** US **JOE HENRY** FUSE **JOE HENRY** TRAMPOLINE **KEITH JARRETT** FACING YOU **KEITH JARRETT** MY SONG **PAUL KELLY** SONGS FROM THE SOUTH **NUSRAT FATEH ALI KHAN** DEVOTIONAL AND LOVE SONGS **CAROLE KING** TAPESTRY **K.D. LANG** ALL YOU CAN EAT **K.D. LANG** INGÉNUE **LED ZEPPELIN** BBC SESSIONS **ANNIE LENNOX** DIVA **LIVE** THROWING COPPER **MAX Q** MAX Q **DON McLEAN** AMERICAN PIE **JONI MITCHELL** NIGHT RIDE HOME **MOZART** REQUIEM **YOUSSOU N'DOUR** THE LION **NIRVANA** MTV UNPLUGGED IN NEW YORK **NOT DROWNING, WAVING** THE COLD AND THE CRACKLE **PAVLOV'S DOG** PAMPERED MENIAL **PEARL JAM** VITALOGY **POWDERFINGER** INTERNATIONALIST **POWDERFINGER** ODYSSEY NUMBER FIVE **PRINCE** PURPLE RAIN **RADIOHEAD** THE BENDS **RADIOHEAD** KID A **RADIOHEAD** OK COMPUTER **EDDI READER** CANDYFLOSS AND MEDICINE **EDDI READER** MIRMAMA **VIRGINIA RODRIGUES** SOL NEGRO **SEAL** SEAL **SILVERCHAIR** FREAK SHOW **SILVERCHAIR** FROGSTOMP **NINA SIMONE** THE BLUES **THE SLEEPY JACKSON** LOVERS **SOMETHING FOR KATE** THE OFFICIAL FICTION **SOUNDGARDEN** SUPERUNKNOWN **CAT STEVENS** TEA FOR THE TILLERMAN **STING** TEN SUMMONER'S TALES **STING** MERCURY FALLING **STING** . . . NOTHING LIKE THE SUN **STONE TEMPLE PILOTS** CORE **TALKING HEADS** LITTLE CREATURES **TALKING HEADS** REMAIN IN LIGHT **TALKING HEADS** SPEAKING IN TONGUES **THIS MORTAL COIL** THIS MORTAL COIL **U2** ACHTUNG BABY **VAN HALEN** 1984 **CHRIS WHITLEY** LIVING WITH THE LAW **CHRIS WHITLEY** PERFECT DAY

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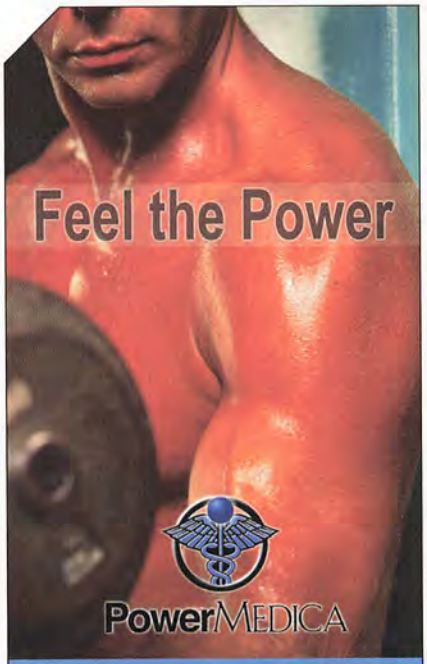

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"And this is another song about my new digital watch!"

IT WAS THE early Christian holy man Saint Augustine who first pleaded to God, "Make me chaste and continent, but not yet." In just eight words, he nearly wrote the mission statement for R&B musicians from Little Richard to Marvin Gaye, whose entire careers were founded upon this two-way tug between the temptations of the flesh and the transcendence of the spirit. But never has the conflict sounded sweeter than when it is sung by Al Green.

The Arkansas-born Green was expelled from his father's gospel group for singing secular pop. But when he teamed with producer Willie Mitchell at Hi Records in Memphis, the pair refined soul music into something almost sublime. After their early 1970s hits "So Tired of Being Alone" and "Let's Stay Together" came a slew of luxury-upholstered albums, of which these two are fine, sleek examples.

From 1973, *Call Me* was a career peak for Green. Thanks to Mitchell, he honed his vocal style to a hybrid of Otis Redding's rabid urgency and Sam Cooke's plaintive yearning — and the result was somehow sexier than both men put together. Over the trademark horns and strings of Mitchell's sound, Green coaxes and implores, murmurs and testifies. He becomes the lover-man supreme — not a cartoon Romeo like Barry White, but the subtlest of seducers, deploying his very vulnerability like a strategic weapon. Covers of country acts Willie Nelson and Hank Williams ("I'm So Lonesome I Could Cry") enrich the mix of Mitchell/Green originals.

The next year's *Al Green Explores Your Mind* was robust where *Call Me* had been slinky, but it yields a masterpiece in "Take Me to the River," a track that's been covered by acts from Foghat to Tom Jones, Talking Heads to Eva Cassidy. Here, with Southern baptismal fervor and earthy intensity ("I don't know why I love you like I do"), the singer rides the clipped, propulsive funkiness of Mitchell's expert rhythm section like a champion jockey. Meanwhile, his feathery falsetto gets to fly on the hit single "Sha-La-La (Make Me Happy)."

Al Green was the subtlest of seducers.

The album arrived at a transformative point in Green's life. That same year, he was attacked in the shower by an ex-girlfriend bearing a pan of scalding grits. Injured and traumatized, he returned to the bosom of the church and became the pastor of the Full Gospel Tabernacle Church. Shortly thereafter, Green announced he was going gospel full-time. (In his last secular classic, "Belle," he sang to his beloved: "It's you I want but it's Him that I need.") But he always insisted that his return to the faith began before the shower incident, and a careful listen to both these records would bear him out.

Drawn from Green's greatest period, these reissues are consistently enjoyable, full of romantic pocket symphonies and virtuoso soul vocalizing. If there really is a contradiction between sex and faith, you would scarcely guess it from the grace of Rev. Green's style, which skips between them in a heartbeat. Praise the Lord — or Willie Mitchell, if you like — but love is celebrated here as a physical force with a spiritual dimension. *PAUL DU NOYER*

DOWNLOAD THESE "Call Me," "Jesus Is Waiting," "Take Me to the River"

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THE ANIMALS

A RETROSPECTIVE: THE ANIMALS 1964–1966, ERIC BURDON & THE ANIMALS 1966–1968, ERIC BURDON & WAR 1970 ✪✪✪

ABKCO

Pugilistic R&B and ersatz psych-rock starring the poor man's Van Morrison

Imagine a Pittsburgh where men walk around in singlets in winter. That's Newcastle, England — hometown of the meanest, frowniest R&B band of the whole British Invasion. Pivoting on Alan Price's boozy organ and Eric Burdon's weather-beaten baritone, their songs sounded like fights ("Gonna Send You Back to Walker") or bouts of drunken self-pity ("Don't Let Me Be Misunderstood"). Only the Animals could have turned Mann & Weil's "We Gotta Get out of This Place" into a belligerent anti-Vietnam anthem, yet by the end of 1966 the original band had crumbled, leaving an acid-munching Burdon to relocate to L.A., where hilarious hippie rock ensued until he was rescued by the black funk group War. With them he made "Spill the Wine" — a Latin psych-funk curio no bachelor pad should be without.

TONY POWER

DOWNLOAD THESE "Gonna Send You Back to Walker," "Don't Let Me Be Misunderstood," "Spill the Wine"

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ANITA BAKER

A NIGHT OF RAPTURE: LIVE ✪✪✪

RHINO

From 1986, a Quiet Storm balladeer makes love drippy and ornate

Anita Baker pours her velvet voice — proud but enfolding, sensual but dignified — over everything she sings, conveying a joy so intense it aches. Recorded the same year as her first multiplatinum album, *Live* (enhanced with three late-'80s videos) captures her at a moment of triumph, and all but one of its songs, Van Morrison's "Moondance," come from her breakthrough album, *Rapture*. Though the singing isn't as note-perfect, spontaneity (a thin-sounding five-piece band plus background vocals) adds a shivery immediacy. Baker's a true believer in romantic love, promising the moon without irony or humor, and her rich pop-soul singing, with accents of gospel and jazz, spills full conviction into lyrics that are often mushed together into wailed sweet nothings.

STEPHEN HOLDEN

DOWNLOAD THIS "You Bring Me Joy"

The Animals: "Tomorrow it's *my* turn to wear the red sweater."

DNA

DNA ON DNA ✪✪✪✪

NO MORE

Retrospective of No Wave noisemaking freakazoid pioneers

Figureheads of New York's pro-noise No Wave movement in the late '70s, DNA proved that you could be in a killer band even if you could not sing or play an instrument, like, at all. Arto Lindsay flailed at his guitar like a cat scrabbling at a door and sang abstract aphorisms like he was gargling in his sleep; Robin Crutchfield whacked resolutely at his keyboard; and Ikue Mori's drumming was more like beekeeping than beat-keeping; but they knew exactly where they were going, even if it was nowhere near Songville. For the later tracks of this retrospective, bassist Tim Wright replaced Crutchfield, and Lindsay and Mori got even weirder and more abrasive. Not for the timid.

DOUGLAS WOLK

DOWNLOAD THESE "Blonde Red Head," "Not Moving"

SISTER ACT

Howls, guitars, curls: It's the femme-rock Led Zeppelin

HEART

LITTLE QUEEN ✪✪✪

DOG & BUTTERFLY ✪✪

BEBE LE STRANGE ✪✪

EPIC/LEGACY

» EVEN IN THEIR heyday, Heart's place in pop was more the result of sociology than music. Fronted by two women, Seattle-bred sisters Ann and Nancy Wilson, the band formed in Vancouver in the early '70s, becoming one of music's first unselfconsciously mixed-gender acts. Most Heart songs — on these three records, primarily hard folk-rock numbers — could just as easily have been performed by men. Which is not to say that the band did not hesitate to make full marketing use of the Wilson sisters' beauty. The cover of their first record, *Dreamboat Annie*, which spawned the Top 40 hit "Magic Man," features them back-to-back, apparently naked, looking sultry and giving no indication whatsoever that there was anyone else in the band.

With Ann on vocals and Nancy on guitar, Heart subsequently released three albums that all went gold or platinum: *Little Queen* in 1977, *Dog & Butterfly* in 1978 and *Bebe Le Strange* in 1980, the present reissues of which neatly coincide with their first new record in close to a decade, *Jupiter's Darling*. Though the band made a comeback as an MOR act in the mid-'80s, during the period covered by these three records, they were candidly Led Zeppelin–influenced, especially when it came to Ann's jet engine–to–gentle soprano range.

This is most evident on *Little Queen*, which is decent throughout. "Barracuda," the album's biggest single, may be only six or seven degrees above formulaic — the lick, for example, can only be described as driving — but has a bite that still holds up. Otherwise, with a few exceptions — the delicate title track of *Dog & Butterfly*, the vengeful rocker "Even It Up," from *Bebe Le Strange* — its successors are, respectively, weak and abrasive.

The bonus tracks of live or previously unreleased material included here are, other than a limp rendition of "Stairway to Heaven," Heart at their best: better than OK, even very good. But minus the women-in-rock element, simply not very interesting.

MIM UDOVITCH

DOWNLOAD THESE "Barracuda," "Little Queen"

> Heart were candidly Led Zeppelin–influenced.

Fine Young Cannibals: Very nice, boys, but didn't we agree the garage should be white?

NICK DRAKE

MADE TO LOVE MAGIC ✪✪✪✪

ISLAND

Boy genius of Britfolk returns from grave — not literally, of course — to deliver undiscovered track

The author of three peerlessly lovely folk-pop albums during his 26 years — and a U.K. cult item ever since, latterly with the post-rave set — the handsome, feathery-voiced Drake OD'd on anti-depressants in 1974. This was just nine months after the February session that yielded this outtakes collection's best tracks: spooked acoustic-guitar mantra "Hanging on a Star" and the frail, near-suicidal "Black Eyed Dog" ("I'm growing old and I wanna go home"). The syrupy, Donovan-ish "Magic" aside, this is stark, bewitching music, while "new" track "Tow the Line" — no more than a blues riff with an inscrutable lyric ("This time is the time that we wait for a while") — sounds purposeful, as if there's life in him yet. If only that had really been the case.

TONY POWER

DOWNLOAD THESE "Tow the Line," "Black Eyed Dog"

DURAN DURAN

ARENA ✪

CAPITOL

Horrific live album from the haircuts that came back from the dead

The rehabilitation of Duran Duran continues to amaze. In their day (the '80s — when else?) they stood unequaled as the acme of poodle-haired, video-fed vacuity. Now we're expected to accept them as standard-bearers of daring art-rock. This catchpenny live album from 1984 will not win over those unconvinced by Duran's tales of fun with cocaine and supermodels. Tinnily covering a multitude of sins with lots of backing vocalists, *Arena* exposes the desperate shortcomings of singer Simon Le Bon, as parched and panicked as a karaoke competitor who knows he's nowhere near drunk enough yet. The usual advice with live albums is "get the studio version instead." In this case, borrow the greatest-hits DVD and watch it with the sound turned off.

ANDREW HARRISON

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FINEST ✪✪

RHINO/SIRE

Brit pop-soul that conquered the world. For about a week

TWO-HIT WONDERS!

When ska sophisticates the English Beat split in 1983, no one expected pencil-necked guitarists Andy Cox and David Steele to be the successful ones. But no one expected unknown singer Roland Gift to sing like a weepy Al Green. The trio's songs mixed social documentary and tenement romance, with "Blue," off their self-titled debut album, hitting epic heights as Gift falls to bits. Their second and last album, *The Raw & the Cooked*, spawned two number 1 *Billboard* singles ("Good Thing" is over-jaunty; "She Drives Me Crazy" remains irresistible), and if you can get beyond the bad drum machines and '80s sheen, there's much to enjoy here — including a witty sleeve note by *Blender* editor Rob Tannenbaum.

TONY POWER

DOWNLOAD THESE "Blue," "She Drives Me Crazy"

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ATLANTIC

"It's like Robert Plant is having sex with this girl in 'Whole Lotta Love,' but then in 'Ramble On,' he's like, 'I gotta split.' "

GRATEFUL DEAD

ROCKIN' THE RHEIN WITH THE GRATEFUL DEAD ✪✪✪✪

RHINO

Drug-crazed Californians give Germans a contact high on vintage live set

The Dead had it all going on musically when they crossed the Atlantic for the tour distilled into *Live '72*; this Düsseldorf show, released in its remastered entirety, nearly equals that onstage apex. The version of "He's Gone" here extends the majesty of their then-recent release, 1970's *American Beauty*. A 44-minute "Dark Star" brackets "El Paso," demonstrating the Dead's turn-on-a-dime facility with both controlled chaos and a simple tune. Indeed, from Jerry Garcia to new keyboardist Keith Godchaux, the entire band sounds exquisitely in sync. And "Turn on Your Lovelight," which is the last version ever sung by band cofounder Ron "Pigpen" McKernan, who died of liver failure the following year, supplies bonus poignancy.

RICHARD GEHR

DOWNLOAD THESE "Playing in the Band," "Turn on Your Lovelight"

GREGORY ISAACS

THE BEST OF GREGORY ISAACS: THE MILLENNIUM COLLECTION ✪✪✪

HIP-O/ISLAND

A narrow cross-section of the reggae loverman's repertoire

Reggae's leading bedroom-eyed crooner, Gregory Isaacs has made hundreds of records over the past 35 years — with his laid-back Mr. Smooth tenor and his lounge-lizard white suit and hat, he's one of the constants of Jamaican pop. So are his songs — almost without exception, they're cool, mid-tempo, two-chord skanks over which Isaacs purrs pleas for love. His sound changes only incrementally as reggae fashions change, which is why it's disappointing that all but one song here was recorded between 1982 and 1984. The album includes Isaacs's most famous song (the plaintive "Night Nurse") and some rock-solid takes on his basic groove, but calling it his best work is stretching things.

DOUGLAS WOLK

DOWNLOAD THESE "Night Nurse," "Universal Tribulation"

DEAN MARTIN

DINO: THE ESSENTIAL DEAN MARTIN ✪✪

CAPITOL

Rat Pack crooner who played Ol' Brown Eyes to Sinatra's Ol' Blue Eyes

A son not of "old Napoli," as his recordings invited you to infer, but of Steubenville, Ohio, Dean Martin parlayed a mellifluous baritone, one notable vocal lick

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(the quick slide down to pitch) and the ability to sing the most audaciously awful lyrics in the English language without embarrassment ("When the moon hits your eye like a big pizza pie, that's *amore*") into pre-rock megastardom. Besides ballads, this collection includes bogus country ("Little Old Wine Drinker Me," where he describes himself, unforgettably, as "sittin' in a honky in Chicago") and even more bogus pop-folk ("Gentle on My Mind," on which he understandably sounds discomfited stashing his sleeping bag behind a lover's couch). His desecration of "Old Man River," the apotheosis of the crooner era's shtick-über-alles aesthetic, is, tragically, omitted.
JOHN MENDELSOHN

DOWNLOAD THESE "Volare," "You Belong to Me"

MEKONS

HONKY TONKIN' ✪✪✪✪

QUARTERSTICK

Politically conscious two-steps from boozy English anarchists' fertile alt-country phase

GREAT PUNK DRUNKS

Of all the revolutionary rockers to emerge from punk's big bang, none would turn out to be as politically steadfast, as musically fickle or as perpetually hung-over as the Mekons. With 1985's *Fear and Whiskey*, these lo-fi Leeds, England, anarchists reinvented themselves as the country pub band of Karl Marx's dreams. They were still drunkenly two-stepping down the lost highway on 1987's *Honky Tonkin'*, a small classic of underdog righteousness complete with an agitprop shout-along ("Keep on Hoppin' "), an ode to pulp novelist and McCarthy witch-hunt hero Dashiell Hammett ("If They Hang You") and their second cover of a nineteenth-century miners' protest dirge ("The Trimdon Grange Explosion"). It's hard not to love an album whose lyric-sheet bibliography reveals inspirations as varied as Hunter S. Thompson, vegetarian cookbooks and *Omen III*.
DENNIS LIM

DOWNLOAD THESE "Keep on Hoppin'," "If They Hang You"

LAURA NYRO

SPREAD YOUR WINGS AND FLY: LIVE AT THE FILLMORE EAST 5/30/71 ✪✪✪

COLUMBIA/LEGACY

Young hippie cult star plays solo, three years before her retirement

This crudely recorded concert album of Laura Nyro at the peak of her powers is a reminder of how the New York City musical prodigy, who died of ovarian cancer in 1997, paved the way for Rickie Lee Jones, Tori Amos and a dozen other singer-songwriters to wail their free-form confessions and fantasies. Nyro, alone on

The Rolling Stones audition for *Oliver*.

piano and bypassing the pop hits she wrote ("Eli's Coming," "And When I Die"), brings an indelible stamp to her rangy set, which includes classic Aretha Franklin, Brill Building hits and her own impassioned torrents of imagery. Distilling classical, jazz, soul, gospel and Broadway influences, her voice evokes primal female connections to the universe. But even at her best, as she is here, her insistency can also sound like the whacked-out whining of an urban flower child posturing as earth mother.
STEPHEN HOLDEN

DOWNLOAD THIS "Emmie"

ROCKPILE

SECONDS OF PLEASURE ✪✪✪

COLUMBIA/LEGACY

Frisky, fast retro rock from England, now featuring bonus live tracks

In 1980, overly smart music fans received a status symbol on a silver platter: the one and only album by overly smart British pub-rock all-stars Nick Lowe, Dave Edmunds, Billy Bremner and Terry Williams. Leapfrogging backward over two decades of rock, it drew inspiration from rockabilly, Chuck Berry, Buddy Holly and the Everly Brothers while adding power-pop energy and a touch of boy-sneers-at-girl cynicism. A cover of R&B singer Gene Chandler's "Teacher Teacher" is still irresistible; Lowe lingers over the lines "Young love, teacher's pet/Cheeks flushed apple-red" as if his infatuation with '50s rock & roll bordered on the erotic. "Now and Always," a straightforward homage to the Everlys, reflects the longing for innocence at the heart of '80s apathy.
KAREN SCHOEMER

DOWNLOAD THESE "Teacher Teacher," "When I Write the Book"

ROLLING STONES

SINGLES VOLUME 2: 1965–1967 ✪✪

ABKCO

Cumbersome box set of 11 original Stones singles on 11 individual CDs

Offering all the drawbacks of the vinyl experience (bulk, fiddlyness) but none of the charming bits (like, er, stylus fluff), this package looks resistable even before you consider the Stones' wobbly mid-'60s. "(I Can't Get No) Satisfaction," from 1965, is their randy, evil R&B at its best, but too often they get distracted by chart rivals the Beatles ("We Love You" breaks down into a Kmart "Tomorrow Never Knows") and the Kinks (the perky but derivative suburban satire "Mother's Little Helper"). Then there are the B-sides: Simpering Elizabethan novelty "Lady Jane" is one of the decent ones and "I'm Free" the most welcome rediscovery, but the more representative "Stupid Girl" is both woman-hating and (as painfully exposed by the razor-sharp remastering) incompetently played. Mercifully for all concerned, "Jumpin' Jack Flash" and a return to randy evilness were just around the corner.
TONY POWER

DOWNLOAD THESE "(I Can't Get No) Satisfaction," "I'm Free," "19th Nervous Breakdown"

BURIED TREASURE

UNEARTHING LOST CLASSICS >>

KATE BUSH
THE WHOLE STORY
✪✪✪✪
EMI AMERICA

Big Boi of Outkast's favorite musician isn't a hip-hop hero — she's a wispy, reclusive British singer-songwriter, control freak and master of the Fairlight synthesizer. Bush is a surrealist with bedroom eyes; her dreamy mysticism and flashes of hyperliterate oddness paved the way for Sarah McLachlan, Dido and Tori Amos. This collection of her most tuneful early singles trims away her spacier moments in favor of darkly throbbing meditations and vocal acrobatics.
DOUGLAS WOLK

DOWNLOAD THESE "Running Up That Hill," "Wuthering Heights"

Kate Bush: "Blow on my nails, you bastards!"

THE STANLEY BROTHERS

AN EVENING LONG AGO: LIVE 1956 ✪✪✪✪

DMZ/COLUMBIA/LEGACY

Legendary country/bluegrass duo relax on an intimate live recording from 1956

The result of a late-night session at WCYB Radio in 1956, *An Evening* catches Ralph and Carter Stanley weary from a long day of hog calls and barn dances. The boys are pleasingly mellow as a result, as if rehearsing in the living room on underdramatized tunes like the jilted-lover's lament "Handsome Molly." There's none of the urgency found on their oldest sides, but the brothers' voices relax into each other beautifully, spinning tender tales of death and familial bonds that transcend it. They get up some steam halfway through for a spirited instrumental take on the folklore classic "John Henry" and the country standard "Orange Blossom Special," with energetic string work re-creating the sounds of a speeding train. Available for years only at concerts, this clean recording deserves a wider audience.
JOHN DEFORE

DOWNLOAD THESE "Orange Blossom Special," "East Virginia Blues"

HOUND DOG TAYLOR

RELEASE THE HOUND ✪✪✪✪

ALLIGATOR

Live ramble from the Chicago wildman

"When I die, they'll say, 'He couldn't play shit, but he sure made it sound good.' " Thus spake Chicago slide guitarist unextraordinaire Hound Dog Taylor. In a recording career that began in 1971 when he was 55 and was ended by cancer four years later, Taylor's trio pioneered a genre: the house-rocking blues of dozens of forgettable bar bands. You remember Taylor because no one except his friend in heaven, Johnny Thunders,

Rex USA (Rolling Stones); P Mazel/Sunshine/Retna UK (Bush); MichaelOchs Archives.com (Velvet Underground); John Spellman/Retna Ltd. (Washington)

ever played dirtier or fuzzier — and also because he came so easily by a good-time spirit that others bust their guts simulating. While most of these pains-takingly exhumed titles are available in other versions, only one is on his previous live album — the format his rude art was made for.

ROBERT CHRISTGAU

DOWNLOAD THESE "It Hurts Me Too," "Wild About You, Baby," "Things Don't Work Out Right"

GEORGE THOROGOOD & THE DESTROYERS

GREATEST HITS: 30 YEARS OF ROCK ✪✪✪

CAPITOL

Brawny Delaware bawler put the blues on a steroid diet

If blues was invented at the crossroads, George Thorogood relocated it to Applebee's. A devotee of Bo Diddley and John Lee Hooker, Thorogood and his band became stars in the '70s by mass-marketing boogie to the Midwest, trading in force and relentlessness. There are no experimental periods among these 16 cuts, just blues-rock comfort food: lyrics sung with a reverent and enthusiastic growl, punctuated by dense guitar riffs. Though he's perhaps best known for 1982's silly self-penned hit "Bad to the Bone," it's the old stuff that gets the Delaware native's motor running, including revved-up covers of Hank Williams's "Move It on Over" and Diddley's "Who Do You Love." And on Hooker's epic "One Bourbon, One Scotch, One Beer," Thorogood and the Destroyers become the sweatiest, baddest bar band on the planet for eight glorious minutes.

ERIK HIMMELSBACH

DOWNLOAD THESE "One Bourbon, One Scotch, One Beer," "Who Do You Love"

VARIOUS ARTISTS

CRUNK CLASSICS ✪✪✪

TVT

From Lil Jon to Three 6 Mafia to Petey Pablo, music to get the party (and the brawl) started

Lil Jon would be the first to admit: Crunk stars can't rap to save their lives. For the men (and, yes, handful of women)

Lil Jon can make even *pattycake* crunk!

behind the rowdy Dirty South genre, it's party music first, fight music a close second — coming from a part of the United States scarred by slavery, segregation and poverty, it's one loaded primal scream. This compilation reaches back to 1992, tracing the evolution of the genre and stopping before its crossover, meaning no Usher's "Yeah!" nor Lil Jon's "Get Low" — these are all regional smashes, full of violent chants, booming bass and doomsday synths. Trick Daddy scowls through the confrontational "Shut Up," Miami's Iconz ride a Timbaland-ish skitter on "Get Fucked Up" and Lil Jon promises to crunch wimps on 2001's "Bia' Bia' 2." For these guys, the measure of a good rhyme is whether or not it makes half the club tear off their shirts. Or maybe slam someone in the neck with a barstool.

JONAH WEINER

DOWNLOAD THESE Trick Daddy, "Shut Up," Lil Jon & the Eastside Boyz, "Bia' Bia' 2"

THE VELVET UNDERGROUND

LIVE AT MAX'S KANSAS CITY (DELUXE EDITION) ✪✪✪

ATLANTIC/RHINO

A last-ditch product of 1972 becomes a you-are-there keepsake of 2004

Recorded in notorious lo-fi from the table of Andy Warhol hanger-on Brigid Polk in 1970, Lou Reed's last Velvets show until 1993 is one of the few collector's items to gain patina with the remastered, bonus-cutted, double-disc overkill of the CD era. Although the basic effect is still that of hearing a band from the back of a noisy bar, the audio is crisper and more forceful. Although original bassist/viola player John Cale and drummer Mo Tucker are gone, Reed does sing songs performed in their official studio versions by Nico and auxiliary member Doug Yule. And although *Live 1969* remains the essential document, it is cool to hear Polk's buddies chatting obliviously about Richard Nixon and Tuinols as punk's forefathers go gamely into that good night.

ROBERT CHRISTGAU

DOWNLOAD THESE "I'm Waiting for the Man," "Sunday Morning"

I LOVE THIS CD!

DENZEL WASHINGTON
ACTOR IN *A MAN APART* AND *TRAINING DAY*

MILES DAVIS
SKETCHES OF SPAIN
COLUMBIA/LEGACY

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THE WATERBOYS

THIS IS THE SEA ✪✪

CAPITOL

A Scottish group equates "ambition" with "bombast"

Earnest rock bombast was not a scarce commodity in 1985, a year dominated by Bruce Springsteen's *Born in the U.S.A.* and U2's *The Unforgettable Fire*. Still, Mike Scott thought the world needed more. The third Waterboys album raised the bar: reflections on mankind, religion, war and the British Empire, while piled-on tracks of synths, rhythm piano, saxophone and trumpet bogged down the production. "Unicorns and cannonballs, palaces and piers/Trumpets, towers and tenements, wide oceans full of tears," Scott sang in "The Whole of the Moon," leaving listeners to wonder what had happened to the perfectly nice love interest he mentioned in the first and second verses. A bonus CD offers marginally less overwrought outtakes and instrumentals; Scott's liner notes include a bulleted breakdown of what the Velvet Underground, Van Morrison's *Astral Weeks* and classical composer Steve Reich mean to him.

KAREN SCHOEMER

DOWNLOAD THIS "The Whole of the Moon"

ZZ TOP

RANCHO TEXICANO: THE VERY BEST OF ZZ TOP ✪✪✪✪

WARNER BROS.

The strange evolution of rock's beardiest Southern boogie band

Even at two CDs, this is a fat-free George Foreman Grill of a release compared with last year's endless BBQ shack-shaped box set, and it helpfully breaks the good-humored Texas trio's career into two distinct phases. The first CD covers their roughly hewn but still terrific '70s output, including evergreen classic-rock staples "Tush" and "La Grange." Disc two concentrates on their '80s embrace of then state-of-the-art recording techniques; breaking with blues-first purism, they added synths and became unlikely global superstars. While "Gimme All Your Lovin' " and "Sharp Dressed Man" still sound decent, the later songs have aged less well, a situation little helped by the inexplicable inclusion of the baffling "dance mix" of "Legs." Finally, *Rancho Texicano* takes the same approach to the band's recent material as most of their fans — by completely ignoring it.

CLARK COLLIS

DOWNLOAD THESE "La Grange," "Tush"

BLENDER APPROVED

The best REISSUES of the last three months

BRIAN ENO

TAKING TIGER MOUNTAIN (BY STRATEGY)

ASTRALWERKS

This 1974 masterpiece (inspired by the Chinese Cultural Revolution!) makes arty synth noodling into pretty pop.

FACES

FIVE GUYS WALK INTO A BAR . . .

RHINO/WARNER BROS.

In the early '70s — before Rod Stewart became king of the cruise-ship standard — he was kicking out the blues, folk and country jams collected here.

NAS

ILLMATIC: 10TH ANNIVERSARY PLATINUM EDITION

SONY URBAN/COLUMBIA

The two new songs and remixes are negligible, but this 1994 set is a classic of hip-hop realism.

THE JACKSONS

THE ESSENTIAL JACKSONS

EPIC/LEGACY

After all their voices broke, the Jackson 5 cut the numeral from their name and explored mellow soul and joyous dance-pop.

REISSUES IN BRIEF

BY JON YOUNG

Styx: Boy bands sure looked different back in the '70s.

DONOVAN

THE ESSENTIAL DONOVAN ✪✪✪

EPIC/LEGACY

Briefly — and absurdly — regarded as the U.K.'s Bob Dylan, the genteel Scotsman was simply a gifted craftsman of bubblegum hippie pop. Among the confections: the painfully cute "Mellow Yellow," "There Is a Mountain" (later a source of the Allmans' "Mountain Jam") and the creepy "Hurdy Gurdy Man," featuring future Led Zeppelin stars Jimmy Page and John Bonham.

NEVILLE BROTHERS

MILLENNIUM COLLECTION ✪✪

A&M

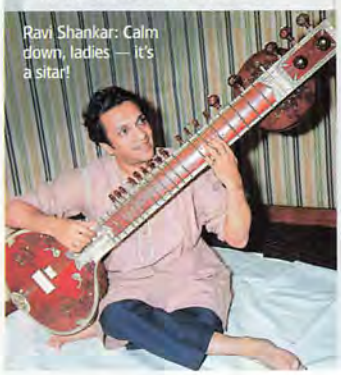
A knockout concert act, the four Nevilles can't sustain their funky New Orleans grooves in the studio. Apart from two fiery live tracks, these '80s and '90s performances are mostly muddled, especially a busy take on Steve Miller's "Fly Like an Eagle" and a cover of Leonard Cohen's "Bird on a Wire" that burdens Aaron's beautiful voice with production clutter.

KIM RICHEY

THE COLLECTION ✪✪✪

LOST HIGHWAY

While Richey's tunes have been recorded by the Dixie Chicks and Trisha Yearwood, she's no country girl. Drawn from four recent albums, her thoughtful relationship songs reveal a fan of Joni Mitchell ("Straight as the Crow Flies") and Sheryl Crow ("Girl in a Car") whose mild vocals sell the material short.



Ravi Shankar: Calm down, ladies — it's a sitar!

RAVI SHANKAR

THE ROUGH GUIDE TO RAVI SHANKAR ✪✪✪✪

WORLD MUSIC NETWORK

Sitar master Shankar (a.k.a. Norah Jones's dad) inspired George Harrison's clumsy forays into Indian music, but his own work is infinitely more graceful. As ecstatic as the most transcendent jam band, as intensely rhythmic as the deepest funk, his flurries of sweet, piercing sound relieve stress without the brain-rotting side effects of trance-pop.

STYX

COME SAIL AWAY: STYX ANTHOLOGY ✪

A&M/UTV

WEDDING-SINGER MUSES

Starting out as the poor man's Yes, Chicago's Styx were the nadir of progressive rock, with preening vocals and witless instrumental flourishes that add up to pure self-parody. While experts may debate whether the wedding-reception ballads ("Babe") or the pompous arena epics ("Mr. Roboto") are sillier, both provide plenty of unintentional cheap laughs.

THE THREE JOHNS

LIVE IN CHICAGO ✪✪✪✪

BURIED TREASURE

One of umpteen side projects from tireless Mekons leader Jon Langford, the Three Johns turned the political punk-rock of the Reagan era into a drunken bash back in '86. Between the yelping, comic vocals and a surprisingly nimble drum machine, wild-eyed outbursts like "The World of the Workers" scoff at trouble, leaving solutions to others.

VARIOUS ARTISTS

BLACK POWER ✪✪✪✪

SHOUT! FACTORY

This two-disc time capsule chronicles the black pride movement of the '60s and '70s with terrific hard-edged songs (Gil Scott-Heron's "The Revolution Will Not Be Televised," Parliament's "Chocolate City"). Pissed-off sound bites from Malcolm X and other activists expand the picture, yet they also trivialize the fierce political passions of the day.

LFI (Styx), David Magnus/Rex USA (Shankar)

WE COULD HAVE MADE BLUEBERRY, BUT WE DIDN'T, WE MADE CRANBERRY. GET OVER IT.

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EVERY ORIGINAL CD REVIEWED

ELTON JOHN

Born in Pinner, a dreary outer London suburb, Reginald Dwight began playing piano as a 4-year-old in 1951. Twenty years later, he had rechristened himself the more showbizzy Elton Hercules John and was beginning his run of seven consecutive American number 1 albums. Unusually for a singer-songwriter, he doesn't write his own lyrics — they're penned mostly by Bernie Taupin, a determinedly heterosexual fellow Englishman with an obsession for a California rancher's lifestyle.

John's career nose-dived in the late '70s, and he struggled through the '80s before becoming comfortable with his homosexuality, his hair and his newfound sobriety — then his sales were rescued by a cartoon. He's still selling records by the millions. He's had his addictions, he's made more than his fair share of rotten albums, but he's still collaborating with Taupin. There is nobody quite like Elton John.
By John Aizlewood

Elton John used the cane to beat his interior decorator.

BLENDER APPROVED

GOODBYE YELLOW BRICK ROAD *MCA, 1973*
★★★★★

HIS CAREER TRIUMPH

John's best album and, at seven times platinum, his best-selling non-compilation. His third consecutive chart-topper, it epitomized the globally famous mid-'70s singer-songwriter and turned John — already enormously successful — into his generation's leading sales force. Virtually any of this double album's 17 tracks could have been singles; those that were defined those who found Paul Simon too bleak and James Taylor too sugary. Written in under three weeks, it merged the craft of the 11-minute opener, "Funeral for a Friend/Love Lies Bleeding," with the title track's lighter-waving stadium rock, the angst of "Jamaica Jerk-Off" and the weepy "Candle in the Wind." John played a reworked version at the funeral of Princess Diana, making the tearjerker the most successful single ever.
Download these: "Goodbye Yellow Brick Road," "Bennie and the Jets," "Candle in the Wind"

CAPTAIN FANTASTIC & THE BROWN DIRT COWBOY
MCA, 1975
★★★★★

An autobiographical album written on a cruise ship. Captain Fantastic, perhaps unsurprisingly, was John, while Taupin got to be the Brown Dirt Cowboy. This details their early years in surprisingly moving fashion. Having achieved a global audience, the pair were in a position to do whatever they pleased. They bravely decided to take introspective chances when contrasting their enormous success with their struggle to achieve it. "Someone Saved My Life Tonight" was Taupin's interpretation of what John described as his "Woody Allen suicide attempt." The songs are consistent — try the rarely resurrected closer, "Curtains" — particularly because the melodies remain among John's finest.
Download these: "Someone Saved My Life Tonight," "We All Fall in Love Sometimes," "Tower of Babel"

HONKY CHÂTEAU *UNI, 1972*
★★★★

John's first number 1 record represented the moment he broke away from the tense, claustrophobic feeling of his early recordings into a wide-screen, all-encompassing, world-straddling sound. From its title to its near-title track "Honky Cat" (in 1972, everyone was either a "honky" or a "cat"), *Honky Château* sounded like a man having fun with his music and his muse. Apparently, liquor was available during the recording sessions.
Download these: "Rocket Man (I Think It's Going to Be a Long, Long Time)", "Mona Lisas & Mad Hatters," "Hercules"

SONGS FROM THE WEST COAST *UNIVERSAL, 2001*
★★★★★

After promising to return to the sound and inspiration of his glory days for almost 30 years, John finally succeeded with an album that was smart, funny, sad and packed with memorable songs. He even took on overtly political issues with "American Triangle," the tale of the homophobic murder of student Matthew Shepard. After all those years, John's glorious melodic skills and Taupin's wry literacy gelled once more.
Download these: "Original Sin," "Birds," "The Emperor's New Clothes"

GREATEST HITS 1970–2002 *ISLAND, 2002*
★★★★★

This is the 34-song case for Elton John's genius. Its nearly chronological approach obscures his decline (disc one finishes in 1976; disc two begins in 1982), but the careful track selection showcases Romantic Elton ("Your Song"), Epic Elton ("Goodbye Yellow Brick Road"), Funky Elton ("Philadelphia Freedom") and even Cartoon Elton ("Written in the Stars").
Download this: "I Guess That's Why They Call It the Blues"

Note: Not all the "Download these" songs are legally available for download — yet. In those instances, *Blender* encourages you to purchase the original CD. This page: Adnan Bood/Retna Ltd. Following: Terry O'Neill/Corbis Sygma

GREAT

ELTON JOHN *UNI, 1970*
★★★★

Aided by incessant touring, this was John's first chart entry, reaching a healthy number 4. This sophomore offering set the template for the future: tender ballads ("Your Song": "If I was a sculptor, but then again, no") and rip-roaring, complicated sagas ("Take Me to the Pilot"), all backed by Paul Buckmaster's gorgeous, groundbreaking arrangements and, sometimes, a full orchestra.
Download these: "Your Song," "Border Song," "Take Me to the Pilot"

GREATEST HITS *MCA, 1974*
★★★★

The early years rounded up in straightforward but effective fashion. This sold an extraordinary 16 million copies and stayed atop the charts for 10 weeks — in an era when greatest-hits sets were far from guaranteed to perform as well as new albums. It made the point — for the first but not the last time — that John was a singles artist who happened to sell albums like no solo musician had sold them before.
Download these: "Your Song," "Don't Let the Sun Go Down on Me," "Crocodile Rock"

BLUE MOVES *MCA, 1976*
★★★★

Another double LP, and his first studio album since 1971 that didn't reach number 1 (even though it featured Graham Nash and David Crosby on backing vocals). Consequently, it's much underrated. It's a mature, sprawling work, particularly the epic "Tonight," but it has an undercurrent of tension. The heavy-drinking Taupin was starting to write about himself instead of for John, who in turn was burned out by the burden of being the world's most famous pop star and having just admitted to what he called his bisexuality.
Download these: "Sorry Seems to Be the Hardest Word," "Tonight," "Out of the Blue"

TOO LOW FOR ZERO
GEFFEN, 1983
★★★★

Having gone their separate ways after *Blue Moves*, Taupin and John collaborated infrequently until they finally wrote *Too Low for Zero* in its entirety together. The reunion seemed set to reignite a stagnant dual career that, in John's case, had surrendered to cocaine. It certainly reignited their relationship, and they now worked with the understanding that criticism of each other was OK. The engineer was a German woman, Renate Blauel. Soon, in a move that raised eyebrows the world over, she would become Mrs. Elton John.
Download these: "Kiss the Bride," "I Guess That's Why They Call It the Blues," "I'm Still Standing"

REG STRIKES BACK *MCA, 1988*
★★★★

Another rebirth was required after a series of poor-quality John/Taupin records following *Too Low for Zero*. Proper songs, proper tunes and some of Taupin's finest lyrics ("Since God Invented Girls" is splendidly vulgar) all helped John overcome his marital, drug, alcohol, bulimia and legal problems in swaggering fashion. To celebrate the album's deserved success, he sold off all the '70s memorabilia featured on its cover.
Download these: "I Don't Wanna Go on With You Like That," "A Word in Spanish," "Town of Plenty"

TO BE CONTINUED . . .
MCA, 1990
★★★★

A lavishly packaged four-CD box set, so expertly compiled that even the well-documented crappy late-'70s and early-'80s period starts to look passable. John chose the title and recorded a smattering of new material proving this jamboree was not an epitaph but that "my new life starts here."
Download this: "Goodbye Yellow Brick Road"

CHECK IT OUT

TUMBLEWEED CONNECTION *UNI, 1970*
★★★

In the '70s, artists were expected to do concept albums. This one celebrates Taupin's obsession with the Wild(ish) West. More vague, experimental and spartan than its predecessor, *Elton John*, and more adventurous than the pair would become. "Burn Down the Mission" suggested that if John and Taupin were ever to make a gospel album, the results would be holy.
Download this: "Burn Down the Mission"

MADMAN ACROSS THE WATER *UNI, 1971*
★★★

Another set that deals with Taupin and John's experiences as two innocent Brits touring the American heartland, not least in "Holiday Inn" and "Rotten Peaches." The climax of a remarkably prolific period, *Madman* shows them about to break through and knowing — not to mention fearing — doing so. The lengthy first single, "Levon," reached only number 24 on its initial release, while the second, "Tiny Dancer" (about Taupin's first wife), struggled to number 41. Both would become John standards, though.
Download this: "Tiny Dancer"

DON'T SHOOT ME, I'M ONLY THE PIANO PLAYER
MCA, 1973
★★★

Getting more poppy by the album, John was on his way to becoming the most successful singer on earth. Incredibly, teenage girls screamed at him, and his image became increasingly outrageous. This album was written in two days, and it often sounds like it. But "Crocodile Rock," his ode to melodic rock & roll, gave him his first number 1 single despite being a rewrite of Pat Boone's "Speedy Gonzales."
Download this: "Crocodile Rock"

ROCK OF THE WESTIES
MCA, 1975
★★★

A lighthearted but scrappy follow-up to *Captain Fantastic & the Brown Dirt Cowboy* featuring John's new band, which gave the music a newly rocky West Coast sheen. His last album to reach number 1, this was allegedly written and recorded in a week, and although it has its moments — the brisk "Island Girl" and the power ballad "I Feel Like a Bullet (In the Gun of Robert Ford)" — a little more care would have helped. "Grow Some Funk of Your Own" is John's mid-'70s nadir.
Download this: "Island Girl"

GREATEST HITS VOLUME II
MCA, 1977
★★★

This compiles material left off his first greatest-hits collection and four new-to-album singles, including the surprisingly soulful "Philadelphia Freedom" and a version of "Lucy in the Sky With Diamonds" featuring John Lennon under his pseudonym, Dr. Winston O'Boogie. Even so, the album peaked at number 21.
Download this: "Philadelphia Freedom"

21 AT 33 *MCA, 1980*
★★★

The best album of a dreadful period sandwiched between *Victim of Love* and *The Fox*, this was John's last record for MCA. The title referred to the number of albums (doubles counted as two) he had made by age 33. Three tracks marked the return of Taupin, who had fled after *Blue Moves* to work with Alice Cooper. Oddly, the best song, "Little Jeannie," was a collaboration with Taupin's replacement, Gary Osborne, a friend of John's since the '60s. Most of the Eagles guested.
Download this: "Little Jeannie"

MILESTONES *K-TEL, 1980*
✪✪✪

A skimpy, straightforward compilation. It focused on the early years, but its release as America was falling out of love with John — and its similarity to the first *Greatest Hits* — blew its chances of success.
Download this: "Your Song"

BREAKING HEARTS
GEFFEN, 1984
✪✪✪

John re-recruited old members of his band in an attempt to emulate his classic '70s sound. It almost worked. Indeed, had John not been in such a rush — he would sometimes write a song in 15 minutes — this truly might have been a creative renaissance. The title refers to the state of John's marriage at the time.
Download this: "Passengers"

THE ONE *MCA, 1992*
✪✪✪

THE DRUG-FREE RETURN!

This was John's first sober album after his career had been derailed and his life taken over by addictions to alcohol and cocaine ("When I [illegible]ly over the Alps, I think, 'That's like all the cocaine I've snorted' ") and struggles with bulimia. Rather than being celebratory, it was a ruminative affair with an unusually spiritual tinge.
Download this: "The One"

THE LION KING *HOLLYWOOD, 1993*
✪✪✪

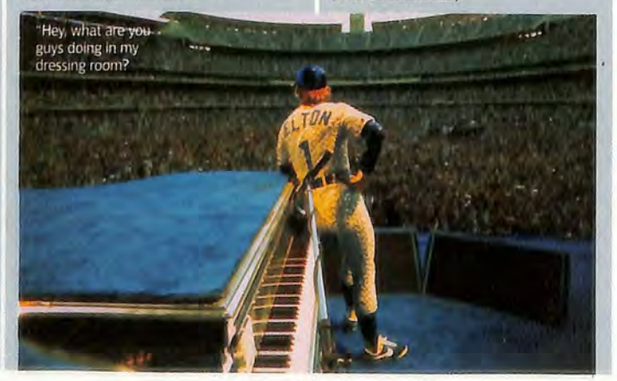
This hugely successful Disney soundtrack is padded with instrumentals from German soundtrack specialist Hans Zimmer, but "Can You Feel the Love Tonight?" and "The Circle of Life" (with lyrics by British songwriter Tim Rice, known for his work with Andrew Lloyd Webber) re-ignited a moribund career.
Download this: "The Circle of Life"

MADE IN ENGLAND
ROCKET/ISLAND, 1995
✪✪✪

Yet another fairly successful attempt to re-create John's '70s sound. Taupin's lyrics are unusually terse, but John's melodies give *Made in England* an invigorating warmth. It's patchy, though.
Download this: "Made in England"

AIDA *ROCKET/ISLAND, 1999*
✪✪✪

A Broadway musical written by John with Tim Rice as a kind of a follow-up to *The Lion King*. On the CD, John duetted with Janet Jackson and Shania Twain. It reached only number 41 on the charts, but its guest list showed another generation (plus James Taylor) paying homage to John.
Download this: "Written in the Stars" (with LeAnn Rimes)



BE CAREFUL

EMPTY SKY *MCA, 1969*
✪✪

His debut (although it wasn't an American hit until 1975) is a fair beginning. Everything is in place: John's blues-honed piano and voice, Taupin's lyrics and even future stalwart Nigel Olsson's drumming. It stalled because the songs weren't yet strong enough, and even at this early stage, a vaguely psychedelic John — the album features a lot of harpsichord — wasn't right.
Download this: "Lady Samantha"

11-17-70 *UNI, 1971*
✪✪

John's first live album, recorded in front of just 125 people for New York's WABC radio station. It's raw, energetic and harmlessly nonessential, and the track selection — packed with covers and featuring no singles — is, shall we say, adventurous.
Download this: "Sixty Years On"

FRIENDS *PARAMOUNT, 1971*
✪✪

His first soundtrack, made up of dreary instrumentals and Taupin madness: "I'm your mister funky/I did the donkey/Now I'm your funky monkey," indeed.
Download this: "Michelle's Song"

CARIBOU *MCA, 1974*
✪✪

A disappointment after *Goodbye Yellow Brick Road*. John squabbled with the band and with producer Gus Dudgeon. The song "Stinker" encapsulated the feel of a sloppy, disconnected collection that stumbled rather than crackled, although the lively "The Bitch Is Back" (based on John's ever-changing moods) almost defined his persona.
Download this: "The Bitch Is Back"

A SINGLE MAN *MCA, 1978*
✪✪

John had dispensed with Taupin and long-time producer Dudgeon. New lyricist Gary Osborne wasn't as intriguingly weird as Taupin, and this lightweight set shows that John's decline was beginning.
Download this: "Part-Time Love"

THE FOX *GEFFEN, 1981*
✪✪

John had admitted to being bisexual in 1976, but by 1981 he went further with *The Fox's* "Elton's Song," the tale of a distinctly homosexual crush. With John in sexual and addiction limbo and his career in free-fall, the album oozed emotional trauma. It didn't ooze great songs.
Download this: "Elton's Song"

JUMP UP! *GEFFEN, 1982*
✪✪

Again Taupin and Osborne compete for lyrical honors. Both have one fine effort — Osborne's "Blue Eyes" and Taupin's thoughtful tribute to John Lennon, "Empty Garden (Hey Hey Johnny)" — but John's melodies are weak, and the other eight tracks plod along inconsequentially.
Download this: "Blue Eyes"

GREATEST HITS VOLUME III *GEFFEN, 1987*
✪✪

A contract-fulfilling roundup of his lousy period. For every moment of the splendor of "I Guess That's Why They Call It the Blues," there was the dirge of "Heartache All Over the World." This collection reached number 84.
Download this: "I Guess That's Why They Call It the Blues"

THE COMPLETE THOM BELL SESSIONS *MCA, 1989*
✪✪

An aborted 1977 soul album with legendary producer Thom Bell, who was best known for molding the Philly sound of the Stylistics and the Spinners. It's nonessential but no disgrace, especially with the Spinners on backing vocals.
Download this: "Mama Can't Buy You Love"

SLEEPING WITH THE PAST *MCA, 1989*
✪✪

John's final cocaine album, this was intended as a tribute to classic '60s R&B. He was rarely an effective funker, although "Sacrifice" is a ballad of breathtaking beauty.
Download this: "Sacrifice"

RARE MASTERS
POLYDOR/CHRONICLES, 1992
✪✪

An exhaustive 37-track rarities, B-sides and outtakes collection drawing on the instrumentals from the *Friends* soundtrack and early-'70s castoffs. Only hardcore John fans will be fascitated.
Download this: "Madman Across the Water (Alternate Version)"

GREATEST HITS 1976–1986 *MCA, 1992*
✪✪

Just four tracks are different from those on *Greatest Hits Volume III*. This helped John fulfill his MCA contract.
Download this: "I Guess That's Why They Call It the Blues"

DUETS *MCA, 1993*
✪✪

RuPaul, k.d. lang, Leonard Cohen, Don Henley, George Michael, Little Richard, Bonnie Raitt and a host of others recorded (and mostly wrote) duets with a disinterested John. Nobody's reputation was enhanced by this cynical set.
Download this: "A Woman's Needs" (with Tammy Wynette)

THE BIG PICTURE
ROCKET/MERCURY, 1997
✪✪

This clumsily welded ballads, straightforward pop and the occasional moment of madness, such as "Live Like Horses," which shows that Taupin's eye for the absurd will never leave him.
Download this: "Live Like Horses"

THE MUSE *ROCKET/ISLAND, 1999*
✪✪

An instrumental soundtrack to Albert Brooks's film starring Sharon Stone. In a similar manner to *Rare Masters'* celebration of outtakes and rarities, background music is always just background music.
Download this: "The Cookie Factory"

THE ROAD TO EL DORADO *DREAMWORKS, 2000*
✪✪

Another soundtrack, another cartoon, another Tim Rice collaboration, another load of padding from Hans Zimmer. These truly were John's water-treading years.
Download these: None

FOR FANS ONLY

HERE & THERE *MCA, 1976*
✪

A contract-fulfilling (for his British label DJM rather than MCA) live album recorded in London and New York. DJM thought it was getting unreleased studio material. Unlistenable.
Download these: None

VICTIM OF LOVE
MCA, 1979
✪

Disco fluff. Wisely, John contributed only vocals. He recorded them in eight hours, which raises the question: How on earth did it take him so long?
Download this: "Warm Love in a Cold World"

ICE ON FIRE *GEFFEN, 1985*
✪

Not even the combined talents of Millie Jackson, George Michael, Sister Sledge and two members of Queen could salvage this synthesizer-dominated affair. Nobody, including the makers of its video (which had John going unconvincingly gooey over a female Soviet border guard), realized that Nikita is a *male* name.
Download this: "Nikita"

LEATHER JACKETS
GEFFEN, 1986
✪

It's mostly outtakes from *Ice on Fire*: That's how bad this is, with its crashing '80s synthetic drums, Taupin at his laziest and John's voice so shot that before long, he would require surgery.
Download this: "Paris"

LIVE IN AUSTRALIA WITH THE MELBOURNE SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA *MCA, 1987*
✪

John's voice was so wrecked during these Sydney dates that he would soon enter the hospital for an operation to remove lesions from his vocal cords. John gave all the members of the orchestra a Rolex for their trouble.
Download this: "Your Song"

CHARTBUSTERS GO POP
RPM, 1994
✪

Before he was famous, John played piano on Muzak versions of current hits to earn a sessioneer's buck. For some reason, some of them were resurrected in 1994. It wasn't even funny the first time.
Download these: None

ONE NIGHT ONLY: THE GREATEST HITS
UNIVERSAL, 2001
✪

POO! IT STINKS!

The idea was to record some concerts at Madison Square Garden in which John duetted with several stars (Bryan Adams, Mary J. Blige, etc.) while backed by his classic '70s band, and release the album within a month of the concerts. That it didn't work was the fault of the pointlessly speedy timetable and the fact that John sounded bored by his guests — and bored by the whole enterprise.
Download this: "I Guess That's Why They Call It the Blues" (with Mary J. Blige)

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TONS OF RASPBERRIES WERE HARMED IN THE MAKING OF THIS PRODUCT. SERIOUSLY, WE SLAUGHTERED TRUCKLOADS OF 'EM.

IF THIS BOTTLE FELL ON NEWTON'S HEAD TODAY, HE'D PROBABLY SCRAP THE WHOLE GRAVITY THING AND JUST SUE.

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"Refreshed" promoter Bill Graham plays the cowbell with the Grateful Dead onstage at the Fillmore Auditorium, 1967

THE BEST PART OF A BIG BOOK!

BILL GRAHAM DROPS ACID

San Francisco, 1967: The Grateful Dead amuse themselves by trying to dose concert promoter Bill Graham with LSD

I'D NEVER TOUCH anything they gave me. I'd never hug them. Their ladies used to want to kiss me because they had first put a blotter of acid in their mouths. I used to say, "Kiss the back of my hair if you want." It became a big running thing. It got to the point that whenever I brought food from home, I would put wax paper around it and seal it with tape. So they couldn't dose anything.

On the job, *somebody* had to be in control, and I decided that it should be me. In that era, I was going through my 7-Up and Coca-Cola phase, where I would be drinking from a can of soda all day long. What I would do in the dressing room at Fillmore West was take garbage bags of ice and fill them up with cans of 7-Up and Coke.

One night they decided to go for it. What they did, unbeknownst to me, was warn all their people, "Don't touch the soda cans in our dressing room." Then they took hypodermic needles and shot acid through the top of every soda can.

I went through the dressing room, took a can of 7-Up and drank it. Twenty minutes later, *snap!* I started feeling weird. I looked in the mirror and all I saw was green and yellow and blue. I looked backstage and I saw Mickey Hart. Mickey was the one. . . . He was thrilled and I could have killed him. "You sonofabitch," I said. And he said, "We're going on, Bill. You want to play?" I said, "Sure." I was on stage for *four* hours. Playing the gong.

Excerpted from *Bill Graham Presents: My Life Inside Rock and Out*, by Bill Graham with Robert Greenfield, © 2004. Reprinted with permission from Da Capo Press.

©Amalie R. Rothschild (Graham); Alphonse Telymonde (still-lifes, 5)

HELL BENT FOR LEATHER

CONFESSIONS OF A HEAVY METAL ADDICT

By Seb Hunter

★★★★ *FOURTH ESTATE, $27*

The kind of kid who named his cat after one of Ratt's guitarists, Seb Hunter attempted to become Britain's newest glam-metal star, and his progress is hilariously recounted in this autobiography. Those uninterested in the cultural significance of the double live album, however, should be warned that *Hell Bent for Leather* devotes no fewer than nine pages to the subject. But what else would you expect from a man who once played in a band called Armageddon's Ring? *CLARK COLLIS*

TABOO TUNES

A HISTORY OF BANNED BANDS & CENSORED SONGS

By Peter Blecha

★★★ *BACKBEAT BOOKS, $18*

This thorough, breezy overview is a useful reminder that fulminations against supposedly degenerate music are as old as music itself—and invariably ebb. In Blecha's telling, for example, the PMRC wars of the '80s seem as quaint as white temperance fanatics' objections to jazz in the '20s. His historical excavations are terrific, but his prose ossifies into a snarky whine when the discussion turns to attacks on modern transgressors such as Prince, Eminem and the Dixie Chicks. *BRIAN DAWSON*

INSIDE A THUG'S HEART

By Angela Ardis, with original poems and letters by Tupac Shakur

★★ *DAFINA BOOKS, $21*

While Tupac Shakur was in prison for rape in the year before his murder, Angela Ardis, on a bet, wrote him a perfume-scented letter. Tupac wrote back. With torturous paragraphs devoted to envelope color choice, Ardis reproduces the ensuing months of letters, conversations and awful poetry. When she visits him in prison, he appears stoned, but never mind: "It was all good." The good times were short-lived, however, as the girlfriend-juggling Shakur ceased writing and the book ends. The most shocking revelation? 'Pac liked Garfield, the cartoon cat. *ADAM BREBNER*

WILCO

LEARNING HOW TO DIE

By Greg Kot

★★★★ *BROADWAY BOOKS, $14*

"Jeff Tweedy," notes one record exec in the course of *Learning How to Die*, "is a twat." Many readers may agree after reading *Blender* contributor Greg Kot's well-researched if by no means uncritical Wilco bio. Of particular interest is the material on the band's dropping by Reprise, revealing the label's execs to be not quite the tone-deaf philistines they were previously assumed to be. But Tweedy himself is given ample opportunity to air his views and to trash others, memorably describing onetime collaborator Billy Bragg as "somewhat full of shit." *CLARK COLLIS*

BLENDER APPROVED

The best BOOKS of the last three months

SONATA FOR JUKEBOX

POP MUSIC, MEMORY AND THE IMAGINED LIFE

By Geoffrey O'Brien

COUNTERPOINT PRESS

Fifteen essays that brilliantly illuminate how we choose the personal soundtracks to our lives

WHITE LINE FEVER

By Lemmy Kilmister with Janiss Garza

CITADEL PRESS

The crusty Motörhead frontman ruminates on his life and fondness for "slutty chicks."

SUNDAY, 8:55 P.M. The Flaming Lips' Wayne Coyne: "You should see Pam Anderson's *other* implant."

DESERT ROCK BLOWOUT!

Goodstock!

Bring your SPF 60: Radiohead, the Pixies and the Cure lord over alt-rock's biggest — and hottest — festival

COACHELLA VALLEY MUSIC & ARTS FESTIVAL

INDIO, CALIFORNIA

MAY 1-2, 2004 ✪✪✪✪

EXTREME HEAT makes people do weird things. So does love. On Sunday afternoon, with the desert temperature well over 100, **Broken Social Scene** play a casual set that's like a backyard indie-pop jam. "Keep love in music!" singer Kevin Drew declares, and soon guitarist Johnny Crossingham makes good on his band's motto: He calls his girlfriend to the stage, gets down on one knee and proposes. (She says yes.)

Call this festival Goodstock: Now in its fifth year, Coachella is a celebration of alternative music's different shapes and forms, a two-day, five-stage circus where even obscure bands play for fans who know all the words. It's a place where hacky-sackers and mohawkers exist peacefully, and warm feelings don't come only from the scorching sun. (Though in the VIP tent, *Blender* does see *The O.C.* star Mischa Barton fighting with her billion-heir boyfriend, Brandon Davis, who actually wipes his nose with a wad of cash.)

Saturday afternoon begins with international exuberance: the dizzy funktronica jams of **Kinky,** a Mexican fivesome, and **Junior Senior,** rhythm bandits who plunder riffs from '70s and '80s ultra-pop. When **Fred Schneider** of the B-52's joins them for "Move Your Feet," the portly Senior shakes his mustached head to the verge of a heart attack.

Beck draws an overflow crowd for his ad hoc solo set, which incorporates a drum machine, his recent lovesick ballads and a Kinks-cover finale with several fans playing tambourine onstage.

Pale Seattle four-piece **Death Cab for Cutie** wear all white, dressed "like janitors," singer Ben Gibbard jokes. Their moody indie-rock sing-alongs hush the crowd, as the beats shift and unsettle the music, following Gibbard into nervousness: "I am waiting for something to go wrong," he nail-bites. With their big choruses, chiming guitars, and slow-boil rave-ups, Death Cab play a standout set.

SATURDAY, 9:00 P.M. Radiohead's Thom Yorke: "Take it away, spotlight!"

As the sun begins to set, Brooklyn's **LCD Soundsystem** fill the Gobi Tent with smart-aleck electropunk, buzzing with low-end assault waves. Ten-strong and disreputable looking, **Desert Sessions** play a kind of German-cabaret-metal, and their three celeb singers — the pale-as-sand **Mark Lanegan** of Screaming Trees, **Brody Dalle** of the Distillers and **Josh Homme** of Queens of the Stone Age — roar horned songs about bad feelings.

The other four stages appear deserted when **the Pixies** trod on at 7:20 P.M., reunited after more than a decade. Three of the band are now bald, including singer Frank Black, who looks more than ever like an alien. "Monkey Gone

George Campos (2)

50,000 hipsters complain about the heat — ironically!

to Heaven" is spacious and grand as he wails cryptically about the Jersey shore, environmental decay and religious codes; "Cactus" builds to a loping burn, as Black and bassist Kim Deal share lines about morbid desire.

"The Pixies changed my life," Thom Yorke declares when Radiohead take the stage next for their only U.S. show of the year. In a set of their best-known songs, including "Creep," they build from electronic ticking to a nervous roar. As Yorke does his hamster dance, clawing at the air, he describes a world where even the most familiar things — the weather, a job, language, authority — can turn adversarial.

Near midnight, the Sahara Tent fills for **Kraftwerk**, the prophetic German synthesizer group. In black suits and ties with red shirts, they stand passively at consoles, recreating 30-plus years of experiments in monotony and mechanics. The crowd, many armed with glow sticks, responds with the kind of dancing that's usually inspired by illegal drugs.

At noon on Sunday, the fields nearly turn clothing-optional; the day is as hot as the devil's tail, and fans strip to the bare minimum. Maybe as a result, the music turns darker and stranger.

On the main stage, New Jersey screamazoids **Thursday** are nervous energy personified. Their blistering songs pack multiple frantic movements, as if asking, "Can things get any worse?" — then answering, "You have no idea," again and again.

The weekend's shining rapper, **Sage Francis**, wears monk's garb, hustling wacky emo confessions in his set, singing about Johnny Cash over a ragtime loop and tossing broccoli into the crowd. He raves in favor of Natalie Portman and against Exxon, exemplifying the weekend's lefty politics. (Two popular T-shirts: "BUSH" and "JESUS HATES YOUR S.U.V.")

Hacky-sackers and mohawkers coexist peacefully.

Atmosphere, the indie-rap duo, name-check Sean John and the late songwriter Elliott Smith in the same song, and proudly sing the pleasures of morning masturbation. Hot copyright infringer **Danger Mouse** shucks the mainstream by embroidering beats with '60s orchestral pop and other crate-digger artifacts. And he does it while dressed in a mouse suit. But the weekend's king of oddball rap is **Kool Keith**, who busts a "freestyle" that consists of counting from one to 19.

As the sun slides behind brown mountains, the evening turns to two boy geniuses. **Dizzee Rascal**, the 19-year-old British MC, whips a packed crowd into a call-and-response frenzy. Lanky as he saunters across the stage, he nails herky-jerk speed raps, laying clattering syllables over explosive electronic beats.

Bright Eyes leader Conor Oberst is everything you could want in an underground rock star: young (24), pretty (he's canoodled with Oscar-nominated groupie Winona Ryder), prodigious (since you've been reading this, he's written four songs) and wincingly precious. Backed by a dozen or so buddies, he brashly lives up to his rep: Economy and humility, he seems to say, are for pussies. On the 10-minute set opener, "Don't Know When but a Day Is Gonna Come," he begins by pondering Jesus, eviscerates George W. Bush, wrestles with epistemological issues and mean dads, and ends up at his favorite bar, waiting for God and a beer. Memorable lyrics pile up at a gaudy rate, then get kicked aside by barroom punk.

More suited to a salon or a parlor, **Belle & Sebastian**'s '60s-informed carousel-pop doesn't project from the main stage. Coming next, **Air** are as suave as a bachelor pad: They focus on their first and only great CD, *Moon Safari*, and their synths feel as soft as designer sheets.

The closing set belongs to **the Cure**, alt-elders who sing about derangement and dislocation in slowly evolving tracks that sway between two chords. But their dirges, cascading from unhappiness to misery, are upstaged by the preceding band, the forcefully optimistic **Flaming Lips**.

Ringleader Wayne Coyne, surrounded by pals in animal costumes, acts like he's conducting a cheerfulness seminar, and his antics can feel forced. The band's set of absurdist psychedelic pop is a shambles, but for good reason: Coyne's entrance is delayed as he climbs into a 20-foot clear ball then rolls out into the crowd, saluting the weekend's orgiastic spirit with a memorable stunt.

"When you motherfuckers go home, tell them I came down from the sky in a bubble," he rejoices after exiting the ball. "And you know they'll fucking believe you."

ROB TANNENBAUM, JONAH WEINER AND CRAIG MARKS

SUNDAY, 7:00 P.M. Bright Eyes are the weekend's breakout performers

SATURDAY, 7:20 P.M. The Pixies' Frank Black — or the Michelin Man?

Clockwise from top: Zach Cordner, George Campos, Butch Hogan

"This is the lamest wet T-shirt contest I've ever seen."

THE GOOD!

STORMY WEATHER

How funny can a film about suicide, epilepsy, prescription-drug dependency and New Jersey be? Very! By Clark Collis

GARDEN STATE

DIRECTED BY Zach Braff

STARRING Zach Braff, Peter Sarsgaard, Natalie Portman

YOU ALWAYS KNOW a movie is going to be good when the credits inform you who played the "masturbating dog." Then again, *Garden State* is the first film *Blender* has ever seen in which that occurs. But this Sundance-acclaimed movie — written, directed by and starring Zach Braff, from TV's *Scrubs* — *is* good, so the rule still applies.

Braff plays a failed version of himself, a very minor Hollywood star, semi-famous for having once portrayed a retarded football player on TV. Following the possibly suicidal death of his mother, whom he once accidentally crippled, Braff is called home to New Jersey by his psychiatrist father (Ian Holm), who has medicated his son with lithium since he was a child. Reconsideration of value systems and emotional thawing ensues.

> It's as funny a film about depression as you could hope for.

Did we mention this is a *comedy?* Despite its serious and often bleak consideration of twentysomething life, *Garden State* is frequently very, very funny. In one of the first, most amusing scenes, we encounter Braff working at a preposterously hip Vietnamese restaurant in L.A. in which waiters wear a pole over their shoulders dangling a pair of buckets, one containing still water, the other sparkling. In fact, Braff the writer-director puts Braff the actor through all manner of comic indignities, including the post-booze-bender discovery that he has been walking around with BALLS written on his forehead all morning, and being forced to watch the aforementioned canine onanist (played, if you're ever in the market for a wanking pooch, by "Magoo").

At his mother's funeral, meanwhile, Braff encounters an old friend (the always great Peter Sarsgaard), who has become a gravedigger and invites Braff to come to a party "right after we bury your mom."

Actually, Sarsgaard's ruminative bonghead is so terrific that after a while you start finding Braff a little irritating by comparison, particularly during the lengthy sequences that find him romancing Natalie Portman. To be frank, the film's conclusion is something of a letdown. But most of *Garden State* is as genuinely hilarious a movie about depression, dysfunction and prescription-drug dependency as you could ever wish to see.

GO, JERSEY!

Some other great things from the Garden State

Tony's secret weapon? The Vulcan death grip!

1. *The Sopranos*
2. Bruce Springsteen
3. Jack Nicholson
4. The light bulb (invented by Thomas Edison in his Menlo Park lab)
5. Kevin Smith
6. Kevin Spacey
7. It's the car-theft capital of the world!
8. Frank Sinatra
9. Did we mention *The Sopranos*?
10. That's it.

Jon Bon Jovi: "Hey, what about me?"

KC Bailey (Garden State); Robert Vizzini/Nonstock (sign); Stephen Danelian/Corbis Outline (The Sopranos); Neal Preston/Corbis (Bon Jovi)

THE BAD!

SHALL WE DANCE?

DIRECTED BY Peter Chelsom

STARRING Richard Gere, Jennifer Lopez

HAVING HAPPILY sat through such recent gore-drenched horror movies as the *Texas Chainsaw Massacre* and *Dawn of the Dead* remakes, *Blender* assumed that nothing could turn our stomach. Then along came the trailer for this remake of a 1996 Japanese film, which shows bored, overworked accountant Richard Gere (we're not liking it already) recovering his zest for life (nope, still sounds crappy) through the power of ballroom dancing (*aaargh!*). It comes as little comfort to discover that the woman responsible for our hero's re-zestitude is none other than her bootiness, Jennifer Lopez. At least it can't be as bad as *Gigli*, though, right? Right?

& THE INDIE!

WE DON'T LIVE HERE ANYMORE

DIRECTED BY John Curran

STARRING Mark Ruffalo, Laura Dern, Peter Krause, Naomi Watts

JACK (RUFFALO) and Edith (Watts) are a married couple in love. Unfortunately, they are not married to each other — in fact, Edith is married to Jack's best friend, Hank. Apparently unfamiliar with the "two wrongs don't make a right" equation, a guilt-ridden Jack schemes to push his own wife (Dern) into an affair with Hank. Spoiler alert! Things get very ugly indeed. Based on two novellas by Andre Dubus (*In the Bedroom*), the script rings so true to life, it comes as no surprise to learn that Dubus burned through three marriages himself. *PAULINE O'CONNOR*

David James/Courtesy of Miramax Films (Shall We Dance?); Kimberly French (We Don't Live Here Anymore); Sony Pictures Imageworks (Spider-Man 2); Bob Akester (Super Size Me); Rahav Segev/Retna Ltd. (Lil' Kim); Frank Connor (Collateral); Ken Regan (The Manchurian Candidate); courtesy of Sony Pictures Classics (Riding Giants); courtesy of Touchstone (The Village); Ava Gerlitz (I, Robot); Jurgen Vollmer (Alien vs. Predator)

BLENDER APPROVED

The best MOVIES of the last three months

SPIDER-MAN 2

A tights-wearing, love-sick loner wrestles a guy with eight limbs in what is not, remarkably, a Fox reality show.

SUPER SIZE ME

A documentary filmmaker eats nothing but McDonald's for a month — with hilarious, liver-damaging results.

LAST GOOD MOVIE YOU SAW?

LIL' KIM
SALTY RAPPER

"*You Got Served.* Two crews dance and battle like they did back in the day. It's got old-school spirit that can't fade."

AND THE REST...

DON'T MISS

COLLATERAL

DIRECTED BY Michael Mann

STARRING Tom Cruise, Jamie Foxx

THE PITCH When a cabdriver (Foxx) is held hostage by a contract killer (Cruise), he must save his own life and that of the hitman's target. Either way, he'll be after a *really* big tip.

THE VERDICT No one does urban crime movies as well as Michael Mann. But we're still mourning the loss of *Collateral*'s original what-the-hey? cast: Adam Sandler and Val Kilmer!

THE MANCHURIAN CANDIDATE

DIRECTED BY Jonathan Demme

STARRING Denzel Washington, Liev Schreiber

THE PITCH In this revamp of the classic thriller, soldiers Washington and Schreiber return from the Gulf War with gaps in their memory. Are enemy brainwashers to blame? Yes!

THE VERDICT Demme's never made a bad film — except for *The Truth About Charlie*, his *last* attempt at updating a classic paranoid thriller.

RIDING GIANTS

DIRECTED BY Stacy Peralta

STARRING Greg "Da Bull" Noll, Jeff Clark

THE PITCH From the *Dogtown and Z-Boys* team, *Riding Giants* tells the alternately thrilling, hilarious and deeply tragic history of big-wave surfing.

THE VERDICT Probably the best surf documentary ever, and the closest most people will get to feeling — as one surfer describes it — "like a piece of lint in a washing machine."

THE VILLAGE

DIRECTED BY M. Night Shyamalan

STARRING Joaquin Phoenix, Adrien Brody

THE PITCH If you go down to the woods today, you may be menaced by "mythical creatures" (if you're in M. Night Shyamalan's chiller).

THE VERDICT As usual with Shyamalan's movies, few details have sneaked out, but expect plenty of frights, a big surprise at the end — and for it all to seem strangely lame on second viewing.

DON'T RUSH

I, ROBOT

DIRECTED BY Alex Proyas

STARRING Will Smith, Bridget Moynahan

THE PITCH How can near-future cop Will Smith save mankind from a computerized reign of terror? We suggest he start by renting *Blade Runner*, *The Terminator* and *The Matrix*.

THE VERDICT The trailer looks like an uneasy marriage of sci-fi action extravaganza and Smith's goofball persona. On the other hand, so did the trailer for *Men in Black*.

ALIEN VS. PREDATOR

DIRECTED BY Paul W.S. Anderson

STARRING Aliens, predators, Lance Henriksen

THE PITCH An archeological team in Antarctica is caught in the middle of the titular extra-terrestrial throwdown in this franchise fusion.

THE VERDICT While director Anderson did a surprisingly creditable job with *Resident Evil*, if this is as good as *Alien*, *Aliens* or the original *Predator*, we promise to eat our alarmingly large collection of horror-movie action figures.

Zombies love eating flesh, copping a feel.

LUST FOR LIFE

Sarah Polley discovers that the odds of surviving an onslaught of flesh-eating zombies are horrifyingly slim. By Clark Collis

DAWN OF THE DEAD

DIRECTED BY Zack Snyder

STARRING Sarah Polley, Ving Rhames, Mekhi Phifer, Jake Weber

UNIVERSAL STUDIOS HOME VIDEO

✪✪✪✪✪

WHEN UNIVERSAL announced that it was remaking George Romero's 1978 classic *Dawn of the Dead,* the horror-film-geek community was so outraged, it looked for a while as though they might leave their parents' basements to burn down Tinseltown.

They were hardly placated by the news that the new version would be written by *Scooby-Doo* scribe James Gunn. Gunn's ghoulish humor, though, turns out to be one of the film's many treats. "Everybody's dead!" declares one of the mismatched band of still-living who've sought sanctuary from the legions of undead in the relative safety of a mall. "Your mom's dead! Your brother's dead! That fat chick at Dairy Queen — dead!" At another point, a new arrival to the mall also declares that everyone is dead "in the sense that they all fell down and then got up, and now they're eating each other."

Later, some of the more gung-ho survivors entertain themselves on the roof of the mall by picking out zombies below who look like celebrities ("Burt Reynolds!" "Rosie O'Donnell!") and then blowing their brains out.

But although *Dawn* is pretty amusing, it is *really* terrifying. The pre-title sequence, in which a nurse (Sarah Polley) staves off attacks from the cutie-pie girl from next door and then her own husband before lurching out of her house into Zombietown, may be the most oh-my-*God!* start to a film ever. That traumatizing scene, however, is immediately topped by the credit sequence, which tracks, through grainy news reports, the elimination of humanity to the apocalyptic strains of Johnny Cash crooning "The Man Comes Around."

> *Dawn* is pretty amusing — but it's *really* terrifying.

With the slavering undead not stumbling about but, à la *28 Days Later,* sprinting toward their prey like Olympic athletes, what ensues is some of the most nerve-fraying and downright wrong mayhem ever committed to celluloid. How wrong? Two words: *zombie birth.* And don't even *think* about turning off the DVD before the conclusion of the end credits, which feature the most frightening should-have-worn-brown-pants moments of all.

50 FIRST DATES

COLUMBIA TRISTAR HOME ENTERTAINMENT

✪✪✪✪

Who would have thought that a preteen alcoholic and *SNL*'s Operaman would one day become Hollywood's premier romantic-comedy couple? This second film to pair Drew Barrymore and Adam Sandler proves that's the case. One-night-stand aficionado Sandler falls for Barrymore, who, following a car accident, has no short-term memory and thus needs to be wooed afresh every day. You'll laugh, you'll cry, you'll see a walrus blow chunks.

ALONG CAME POLLY

UNIVERSAL STUDIOS HOME VIDEO

✪✪

Jennifer Aniston *is* Polly Prince, a kooky New York waitress. Ben Stiller *is* Reuben Feffer, a danger-avoiding risk analyst whose wife leaves him for a scuba diver on their honeymoon. The scene in which Stiller copes with an overflowing toilet in Aniston's apartment *is* very much like the bathroom zipper scene in *There's Something About Mary.* In fact, a lot of this below-average, oddly fecal matter–oriented comedy will probably seem familiar, although Aniston's idea for a kids' book about the dangers of fireworks — *The Boy With a Nub for an Arm* — is rather special.

BLAZING SADDLES

WARNER HOME VIDEO

✪✪✪✪✪

How do you make one of the most successful Westerns of all time? Well, not by combining fart jokes with an anti-racism polemic and a postmodern chase scene set in modern-day Hollywood. Fortunately, writer-director Mel Brooks ignored said guidelines to create not just a box-office monster but also one of the funniest films ever. This

Blazing Saddles: "You're *both* hired!"

thirtieth-anniversary special edition comes complete with additional scenes, a reunion documentary and a featurette about the late, great Madeline Kahn.

FIELD OF DREAMS

UNIVERSAL STUDIOS HOME VIDEO

✪✪✪✪

There are two guaranteed ways to make a grown man cry: 1) Kick him in the nuts really hard. 2) Show him this evergreen tale of cornfields, magically brought-back-to-life baseball legends and people saying "If you build it, he will come" a lot. A pre-asshole Kevin Costner stars as an Iowa farmer who starts hearing voices and . . . and . . . hey, where did that box of Kleenex go? Bonus materials on this anniversary edition include commentaries and newly discovered deleted scenes.

THE LORD OF THE RINGS: THE RETURN OF THE KING

NEW LINE HOME ENTERTAINMENT

✪✪✪✪✪

Four years ago, the idea of handing zombie gore-teur Peter Jackson the reins of an adaptation of J.R.R. Tolkien's *LOTR,* with all three films shot simulta-

The Return of the King: Viggo Mortensen had the suspicion he was being followed.

Clockwise from top left: Michael Gibson, courtesy of Warner Home Video; Pierre Vinet/New Line Productions

Starsky & Hutch: "Come on, Huggy, just one whore!"

neously, seemed as smart as asking a blind man to drive a school bus. But in retrospect, Jackson may have been the *only* man for the job, as this jaw-droppingly epic, Oscars-laden installment of Frodo & Co.'s ring-disposing quest definitively proves. *GABE SORIA*

SECRET WINDOW

COLUMBIA TRISTAR HOME ENTERTAINMENT

✪✪

After learning his wife is having an affair, a novelist (Johnny Depp) retreats to an isolated cabin, where he is menaced by Southern hick John Turturro. Can Depp work out why his persecutor is accusing him of plagiarism before some terrible dead dog–related things start happening? Apparently not. Non-lobotomized viewers, however, should have little trouble doing so, given that the twists in this Stephen King adaptation aren't so much signposted as spelled out in 20-foot-high neon lights.

STARSKY & HUTCH

WARNER HOME VIDEO

✪✪✪

Oh, how long have we waited for a film in which a child's pony birthday gift is accidentally shot by a policeman disguised as a mime? OK, not that long. But the funniest moment of this '70s cop-show revisit is very, very funny — as is the sequence that finds Ben Stiller's already tightly wound Starsky mistaking cocaine for artificial sweetener. Elsewhere, though, *Starsky & Hutch* fails to match the comic genius of *Old School*, despite the best efforts of returning alumni Will Ferrell, the magnificently permed Vince Vaughn and Snoop Dogg as the pimp-tastic Huggy Bear. Includes behind-the-scenes documentary spoof.

THE STATION AGENT

BUENA VISTA HOME VIDEO

✪✪✪✪

When Peter Dinklage is bequeathed an abandoned railway station, he moves in, having become sick to his back teeth with the world — and, given that Dinklage is a dwarf, his back teeth are unfortunately one of the few normal-sized parts of his body. What ensues is a small — in every sense — but perfectly formed tragicomedy, as Dinklage's splendid isolation is gradually infiltrated by mother-in-mourning Patricia Clarkson and Bobby Cannavale's stoner hotdog vendor.

BLENDER APPROVED

The best DVDs of the last three months

BAD SANTA

MIRAMAX HOME ENTERTAINMENT

Billy Bob Thornton's Kris Kringle reminds us what the spirit of Christmas is really all about: getting drunk and having sex with fat women.

FRANKENSTEIN

UNIVERSAL STUDIOS HOME VIDEO

This DVD of the *Van Helsing*–inspiring 1931 Universal classic also includes the even better *Bride of Frankenstein* and three *other* sequels. "It's *alliiiiiiiive!*"

MUSIC DVDs

PIXIES

PIXIES

4AD

✪✪✪

Set a camera in front of a cardboard box for three minutes, and you've got footage about as exciting as a Pixies music video — from frumpy clothes to lo-fi effects, visuals were not the recently reunited Boston foursome's strength. Thankfully, this DVD also includes a fantastic 1988 live set that's alternately raucous ("Ed Is Dead"), chilling ("Hey") and gorgeous ("Where Is My Mind?"). A documentary featuring David Bowie and Thom Yorke is bland, while tour footage is for the obsessive only. *JONAH WEINER*

NICK CAVE & THE BAD SEEDS

THE VIDEOS

MUTE FILM

✪✪✪✪

"We don't like doing videos," explains Nick Cave in the course of this collection — that's a shame, as he does them so well. Included are the often delightfully gothic clips for "Stagger Lee," "Red Right Hand" and "The Wild Roses," in which Cave kills Kylie Minogue with a rock. But romantically!

SHAKIRA

LIVE AND OFF THE RECORD

EPIC

✪✪✪✪

This concert movie confirms Shakira as one of pop's greatest, and undoubtedly most lithe, performers. A behind-the-scenes documentary, meanwhile, reveals her to be disconcertingly familiar with Nobel Prize–winning author Gabriel García Márquez ("Hi, Gabo!").

VARIOUS ARTISTS

46664 — THE EVENT

WSM/RHINO

✪✪✪✪

This document of last year's Nelson Mandela–backed anti-AIDS show features performances from Beyoncé, Peter Gabriel and Queen, among others. A worthy cause, to be sure, although it's hard to see how footage of Oprah Winfrey jiggling in her seat really helps anyone.

DURAN DURAN

ARENA: THE MOVIE

CAPITOL

✪✪✪

Entertainingly awful, the 20-year-old *Arena* (whose subtitle, appropriately, is *An Absurd Notion*) is billed as "part live concert and part sci-fi adventure." In truth, "part live concert and part horrible sub–*Mad Max*–type-movie involving dwarves" would be a more accurate assessment.

BOB DYLAN

MTV UNPLUGGED

COLUMBIA MUSIC VIDEO

✪✪✪

This 1994 performance finds Dylan not just unplugged but also seemingly unable to play "Like a Rolling Stone" without totally screwing up the beginning. Otherwise, *Unplugged* serves as a reminder of both Dylan's skills as an acoustic troubadour and of that crazy period when MTV actually played music.

Courtesy of Warner Home Video (Starsky & Hutch); Tracy Bennett (Bad Santa); The Kobal Collection (Frankenstein)

"And I say Fermat's Last Theorem *is* provable!"

BEST WESTERN

Rockstar's new cowboy-themed game is good, badass and ugly. By Gabe Soria and Jonah Weiner

RED DEAD REVOLVER

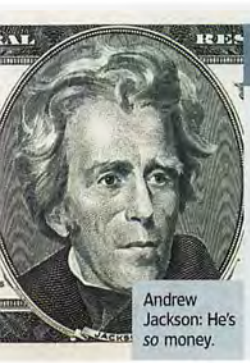
ROCKSTAR GAMES — PS2, XBOX

✪✪✪✪✪

TO COMPLEMENT HBO's savage, *f*-word-happy new series *Deadwood* comes another Spaghetti Western tribute — this one from Rockstar Games, the high priests of video-game brutalism.

In Red Dead Revolver, you are Red, a bounty hunter who's the spitting (but non-copyright-infringing) image of Clint Eastwood in *The Good, the Bad and the Ugly*. After his parents are gunned down by bandits, Red wanders the Old West, taking on a variety of bounty-hunting jobs (one of which involves the hilarious dispatching of an army of homicidal carnival midget clowns) while inching toward his revenge.

Just like Rockstar's ultraviolent Grand Theft Auto series, Revolver spills gallons of blood and guts. Gunfights play out in cinematic slow motion — think Sergio Leone crossed with John Woo — allowing you to slay foes with poetic precision (two knee shots and a sucking chest wound, or an elegant bullet between the eyes, perhaps?). Unlike GTA, however, the extreme carnage actually makes sense, as every massacre Red perpetrates helps lead him to uncovering the identity of his parents' killers. As long as he can avoid those midgets. . . .



Andrew Jackson: He's *so* money.

"I DEMAND SATISFACTION!"

Three duelers who gave gunfighting a bad name

AGONY!
AARON BURR
In 1804, Vice President Burr ended a 13-year political battle with Alexander Hamilton by shooting him in a New Jersey duel. Hamilton lingered for a day before dying in agony; Burr's career was ruined.

BAD SPORT!
ANDREW JACKSON
In 1806, the future president dueled with Charles Dickenson while clad in a billowing gown to conceal the lines of his body. A misfire should have ended matters, but Jackson took a second shot, killing his opponent.

FAMILY FEUD!
ALEXANDER McCLUNG
An infamously deadly shot, McClung picked off seven members of the same family in successive duels. The sure shot turned his gun on himself in 1855. *ADAM HIGGINBOTHAM*

MTV MUSIC GENERATOR 3

CODEMASTERS — PS2, XBOX

Ever wonder how Outkast's "The Way You Move" would sound as a racing Ibiza techno remix? Us neither, and that's pretty much the long and short of what this virtual studio offers. Fumbling with awkward controls, you can remix a handful of hits or create your own beats, all with pre-installed loops. Kinda fun for three minutes, after which Neptunes-in-training are advised to look elsewhere. ✪✪

PSI-OPS: THE MINDGATE CONSPIRACY

MIDWAY — PS2, XBOX

Like Uri Geller crossed with Rambo, Psi-Ops' roughneck hero uses psychic powers to destroy heavily armed enemies — draining their "brain force" to explode their heads, levitating and hurling explosive objects, even taking over their minds and forcing them to mow down their own homies. Along the way, you fight similarly powerful bosses, culminating in a showdown with a bizarre demon named "Miss Cleo." ✪✪✪✪

SIREN

SONY — PS2

Siren traps players in a village that's completely deserted, except, of course, for the hordes of hungry zombies hankering for a human-flesh po' boy. Slow-paced and heavy on atmosphere, Siren might disappoint gamers who prefer their encounters with the living dead to begin and end with a swift shotgun blast to the head. But if it's lingering dread you're after, you've come to the right place: Siren's so scary, it should come with a night light. ✪✪✪

VAN HELSING

VIVENDI UNIVERSAL — PS2, XBOX

In this tie-in to the Hugh Jackman–starring blockbuster, you play as a supernatural bounty hunter under contract to the Church — which means you attack non-Christian foes (a hulking Mr. Hyde, Dracula, etc.) with spinning blades and a pair of six-shooters. The game is compellingly dark and misty, but the camera movement is disorienting, meaning you walk your bad ass into walls more than any self-respecting hitman ever should. ✪✪✪

BLENDER APPROVED

The best GAMES of the last three months

BALDUR'S GATE II: DARK ALLIANCE

INTERPLAY — PS2, XBOX

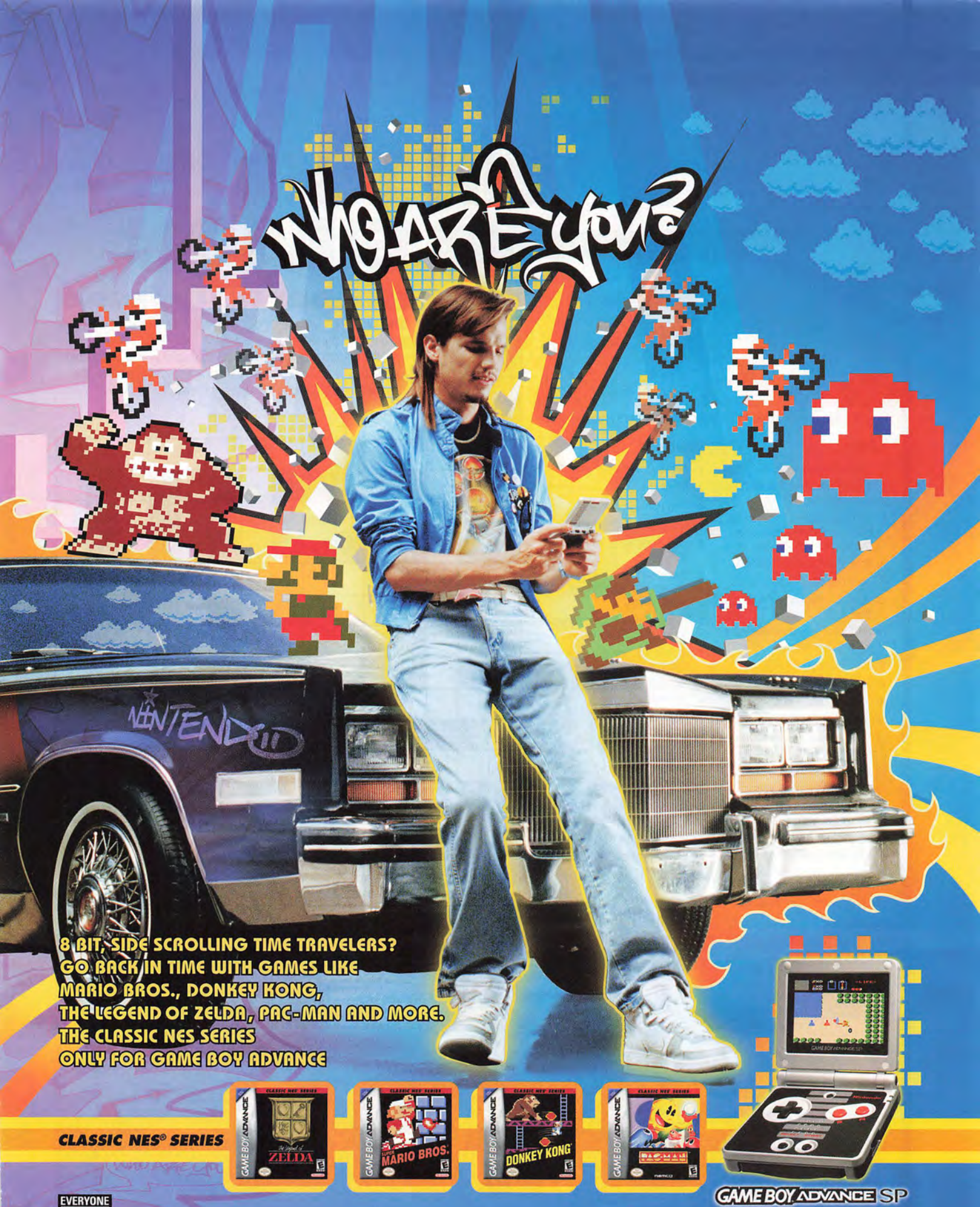
It's Dungeons & Dragons with all of the violence and no lame-ass role-playing!

BATTLEFIELD: VIETNAM

EA — PC

Live the violent parts of *Forrest Gump* in this Vietnam War simulator, which lets you fight as a G.I. or the Vietcong.

Bettmann/Corbis (money)



EVERYONE
E
CONTENT RATED BY ESRB

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WIN THIS GIBSON

Send your completed puzzle to *Blender* Puzzle Contest, 1040 Avenue of the Americas, 22nd floor, New York, New York 10018.

SIGNED BY THE DARKNESS

THEY BELIEVE IN a thing called love, and pretty soon you can believe in a free Les Paul Gibson guitar signed by the Darkness. *Sweeeeeet!* Read the official rules at blender.com, then send us your puzzle and contact info by August 3, 2004. We'll pick a winner at random and post the winner's name at blender.com/crossword. *Whoo-ha!*

PENCIL ME IN!

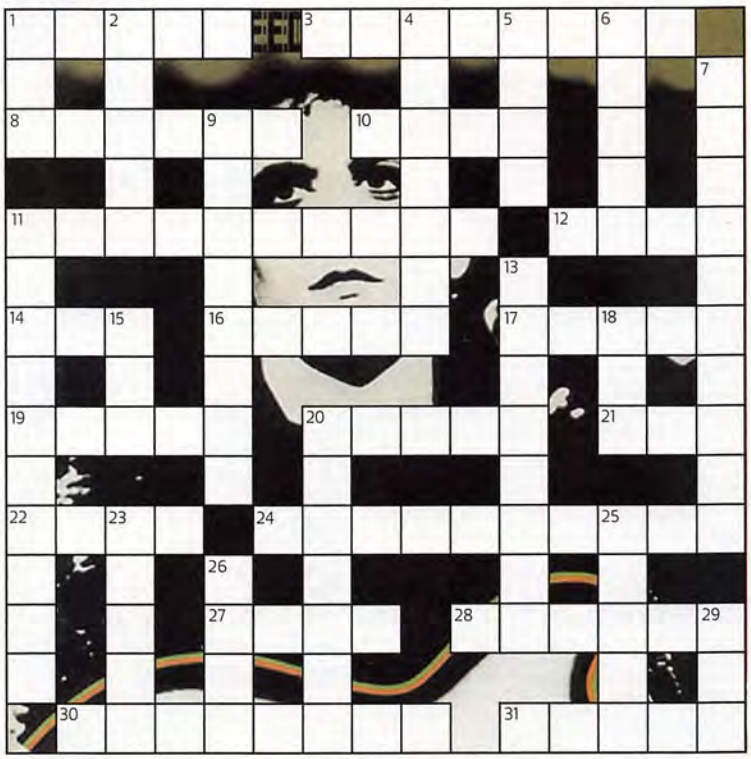
Hey, it's *Blender*'s crossword! Starring 15 Down! BY BRENDAN QUIGLEY

ACROSS

1 Damita Jo's alter ego
3 These British metalheads need permission to land
8 Onetime holder of the *Guinness Book* record for fastest rapper, though he's now got slow jamz
10 They shook you all night long
11 They had brass in pocket
12 Outkast dropped one over Baghdad in 2001
14 MTV afternoon show that made Carson Daly famous
16 They'll play your MP3s
17 Fuck it, he doesn't want you back
19 "___ My Best Friend" (Queen)
20 Gwen Stefani's husband
21 Punk-rockers with the 2004 hit "Silver and Cold"
22 C&W's Jackson
24 This singer-pianist knows a woman's worth (two words)
27 "When you wish ___ a star"
28 Spinal Tap's amps are so loud, they go to this number
30 Political rappers with the 2004 album *RBG* (two words)
31 They go with Guns in arena-rock

DOWN

1 Are you going to be their girl?
2 "Bring the ___" (Public Enemy)
4 They're made of vinyl
5 *The Velvet Underground &* ___
6 His "Thong Song" was a hit in 2000
7 Detroit's other garage-rock act with the album *Pawn Shoppe Heart*
9 These Aussies once got free; now they ride (two words)
11 Rapper with the 2004 hit "Freak-a-Leek" (two words)
13 This dutty rocker gets busy (two words)
15 Reed, of 5 Down
18 Adam Yauch's *nom de Beastie Boys*
20 David, of Pink Floyd
23 Mr. 3000, of Outkast
25 This King took orders from the Colonel
26 Puddle's content?
29 Brooklyn rapper and Jay-Z nemesis

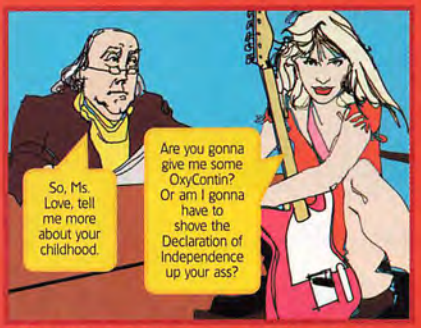


POP HISTORY! JUNE 1752: BENJAMIN FRANKLIN INVENTS REHAB

WRITTEN BY CLARK COLLIS. ILLUSTRATED BY JOHN JAY

↑ It was shortly after discovering electricity that Benjamin Franklin hit upon the idea of a facility for recovering addicts.

↑ Franklin's latest invention proved a huge success.


So, Ms. Love, tell me more about your childhood.
Are you gonna give me some OxyContin? Or am I gonna have to shove the Declaration of Independence up your ass?

↑ But some patients proved easier to treat than others. . . .

Kelly A. Swift/Retna Ltd. (Hawkins); Getty Images (Franklin)

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the hot!

GUEST LIST

COMPETITIONS, EVENTS AND OTHER FUN STUFF WE THOUGHT YOU SHOULD KNOW ABOUT

Great sets from both the sun and Steve Winwood at last year's Austin City Limits Music Festival

HOT MUSIC FEST
DESTINATION: AUSTIN CITY LIMITS

» THE AUSTIN CITY LIMITS Music Festival features three days of music from more than 130 bands on eight stages, all set on the rolling green expanse of Zilker Park in downtown Austin, Texas. Named for the famed public television series *Austin City Limits,* which celebrates its thirtieth season on PBS this year, the festival has already made a mark on America's music landscape in only its third year. To check out the festival's final lineup, check out aclfestival.com. With such a diverse cast of solid performers in the past — such as **R.E.M., Wilco, G. Love and Special Sauce, Ben Harper, Lucinda Williams, Jack Johnson, Ryan Adams, String Cheese Incident, Robert Randolph, Bright Eyes, Drive-By Truckers, Spoon, Al Green, Steve Winwood, the Polyphonic Spree, Ben Kweller and Ween** — music fans know that the ACL Festival always delivers authentic music, pure and simple.

AUSTIN CITY LIMITS Music Festival

HOT DVD THE MAN SHOW

Ziggy sokky, ziggy sokky, hoy! Hoy! Hoy!

★ THE CHAUVINISTIC CELEBRATION of all things male continues with **the Man Show Season Two DVD** six-disc box set. Starring **Adam Carolla** and **Jimmy Kimmel,** this second-season six-pack includes all 26 episodes *plus* bonus footage — more beer, monkeys and, of course, Juggies.

Bring *The Man Show* madness into your home today! Twenty-five lucky winners get a copy of the brand new **Man Show Season Two DVD**, plus the **Season One Volumes One and Two DVDs**. Winners also receive a free subscription to ***Blender.*** *Enter to win at blender.com/contests/ManShow*

NEW DVD IN STORES NOW!

HOT SUMMER BEVERAGE
SUMMER REFRESHMENT WITH NEW SKYY SPORT

★ TRY SKYY SPORT, the new low-carb flavored malt beverage in the cobalt blue bottle. SKYY SPORT has the refreshing taste of citrus with a splash of cranberry that's perfect for summer. SKYY SPORT has fewer calories and fewer than half the carbs of the other top-selling flavored malt beverages. Go to *skyysport.com* for more information.

SKYY SPORT LOW CARB

GET HOT IN JAMAICA . . . WIN!

★ CELEBRATE THE MUSIC OF ISLAND REGGAE
Win a trip to Jamaica courtesy of IslandOutpost.com! You can bake in Jamaica and groove to reggae in the sun with the hottest prize package you'll find all summer. . . .

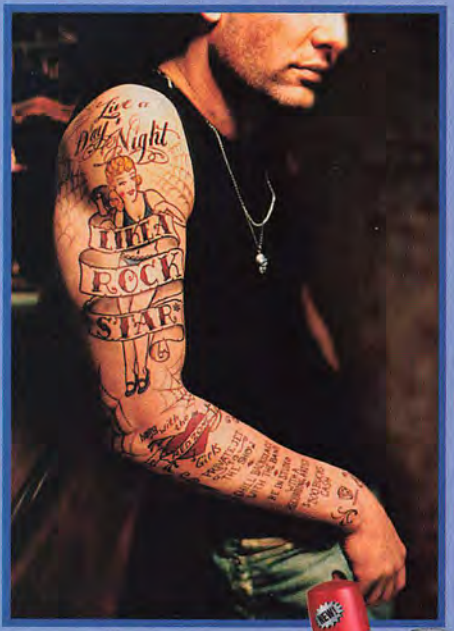
Round-trip airfare for two; four days'/three nights' stay at Jake's.

Hot reggae releases: Bob Marley Live At the Roxy; Jimmy Cliff/20th Century Millennium; Third World 20th Century Millennium; Reggae Box Set

Visit blender.com/contests/reggae for the opportunity to win.

ISLAND REGGAE

HOT PRODUCT OLD SPICE



Live a day and a night like a rock star, but don't smell like a roadie!

oldspice.com to enter to win

Old Spice

➔ He's 29 years old, gambles like a madman, rarely has sex and shops for groceries in the dead of night. Does the man behind "Drift Away" and Kid Rock's decks hate himself? Or, to put it another way...

BY ROB TANNENBAUM
PHOTOGRAPHY BY LEGO

WHO DOES UNCLE KRACKER THINK HE IS?

Now that you've drawn your self-portrait, what do you think it says about you?
It's just some scum sitting in the middle of nothing real fancy. He doesn't look like a very fancy person — just a contented scum from Detroit city.

Congratulations. You are the first person to ever draw *X*s over his own eyes.
It's kind of a blank-stare thing. There's not much tickin', I guess. It would be fun to have a psychiatrist evaluate the drawing. "See, when he drew this in the corner, that means he's really mad about his penis size."

What do you spend too much money on?
I spend way too much money gambling. It's not unusual for me to sit down at blackjack or Texas hold-'em and lose about 20 grand. It hurts to lose. But I don't look at it like that. If I'm down this week, I'll say — see, now I sound like a junkie — "Next week's not gonna be so bad!"

When was your last booty call?
I got married six years ago. I don't even think that I have had sex in, like, five years.

So how would you characterize your taste in sex?
It's probably pretty lame. Just call me Mr. Missionary.

If you were a woman, Mr. Missionary, who would you be?
I guess I'd be Michelle Pfeiffer. Then I would probably lock myself in my apartment and touch myself all day long in front of the mirror and go, "You are so fucking hot." For two years straight.

Who are you planning to vote for this year?
I'll tell you what, man, I'm not mad at Bush right now. I'm not saying he was a fucking rocket scientist to start, but it's just not normal for a president to go into office and get hit with all that shit. I don't know if we need a rookie in there right now. But then again, I don't vote.

John Kerry will be glad to hear that. What personal habit do you have that annoys other people?
I don't sleep much, so I go grocery shopping at 3 or 4 in the morning. My wife hates it. She probably thinks I'm out fucking around. I just like to hit Wal-Mart when it's empty.

Pornography: for or against?
I love it. I'm pro-porn, but I got kids, so it's hard to get in a porn movie. It's Cartoon Network all day long.

"Stairway to Heaven" or "Free Bird"?
"Free Bird." It's easier to play.

What did your third-grade report card say?
I had C average forever. I was smarter than I appeared, but I didn't like to read — I still don't like to read — and I didn't like being told what to do. I was thrown out of class a lot in high school for talking back to teachers.

What's your star sign, and what does it say about you?
I'm a Gemini. I think too much, I'm not very decisive and I'm not a good mate. Maybe I have ADD.

What's the worst mistake you've ever made?
Getting into the music business. I should have stayed at the gas station.

Sure. Think of the career you could've had.
I'm telling you, I might've owned that fucker by now. [BLENDER]

SNEAKERS
AIR FORCE 1 BY NIKE

"I don't like to read!"

Prop Styling by Sherri Gelick Anderson for JGK

REMEMBER: IT'S GOOD TO BE HARD/BUT IT'S HARD TO BE GOOD

POWERED BY: MAD LIBS

MOD LIBS

_____
(verb)

A super _____ way to modify your MINI!
(adjective)

Some _____ took my MINI _____ Libs!
(noun) (verb)

INSTRUCTIONS:
Ask a friend to call out a word, whatever the space asks for. Fill in the blanks, read aloud. Watch hilarity ensue.

LET'S CHANGE OUT THE _____ and put in some
(car part)

_____ . Let's tighten the _____ . Let's drop
(plural noun) (noun)

it _____ inches. Let's give it a _____ roof graphic.
(number) (70s sitcom)

Let's apply shiny new _____ . Let's get to know what's
(plural noun)

under the bonnet better than a _____ .
(occupation)

Let's work on it until our _____ are dirty.
(body parts)

Let's _____ the _____ out of it. LET'S _____ .
(verb) (noun) (motor)

_____ to MINIUSA.COM and make up your own MINI.
(verb)

The MINI Cooper starts at $16,999. But you didn't play Mad Libs because you're into base models. You're into details. Details like this price excludes personalizing options, license, registration and taxes. And MSRP includes destination and handling charges. And MINI dealers will determine the actual price. And © 2004 MINI, a division of BMW of North America, LLC. And the MINI name and logo are registered trademarks. IN5014-04

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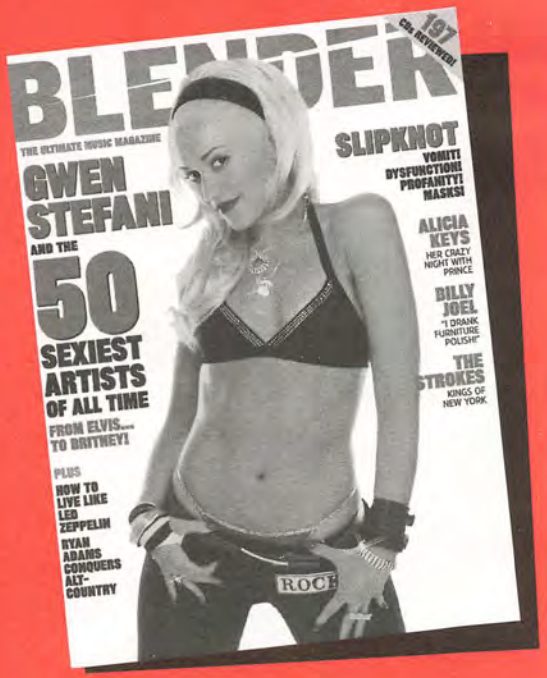

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silk tie from Banana Republic: $58
(last day in the mailroom: priceless)
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Live Responsibly Miller

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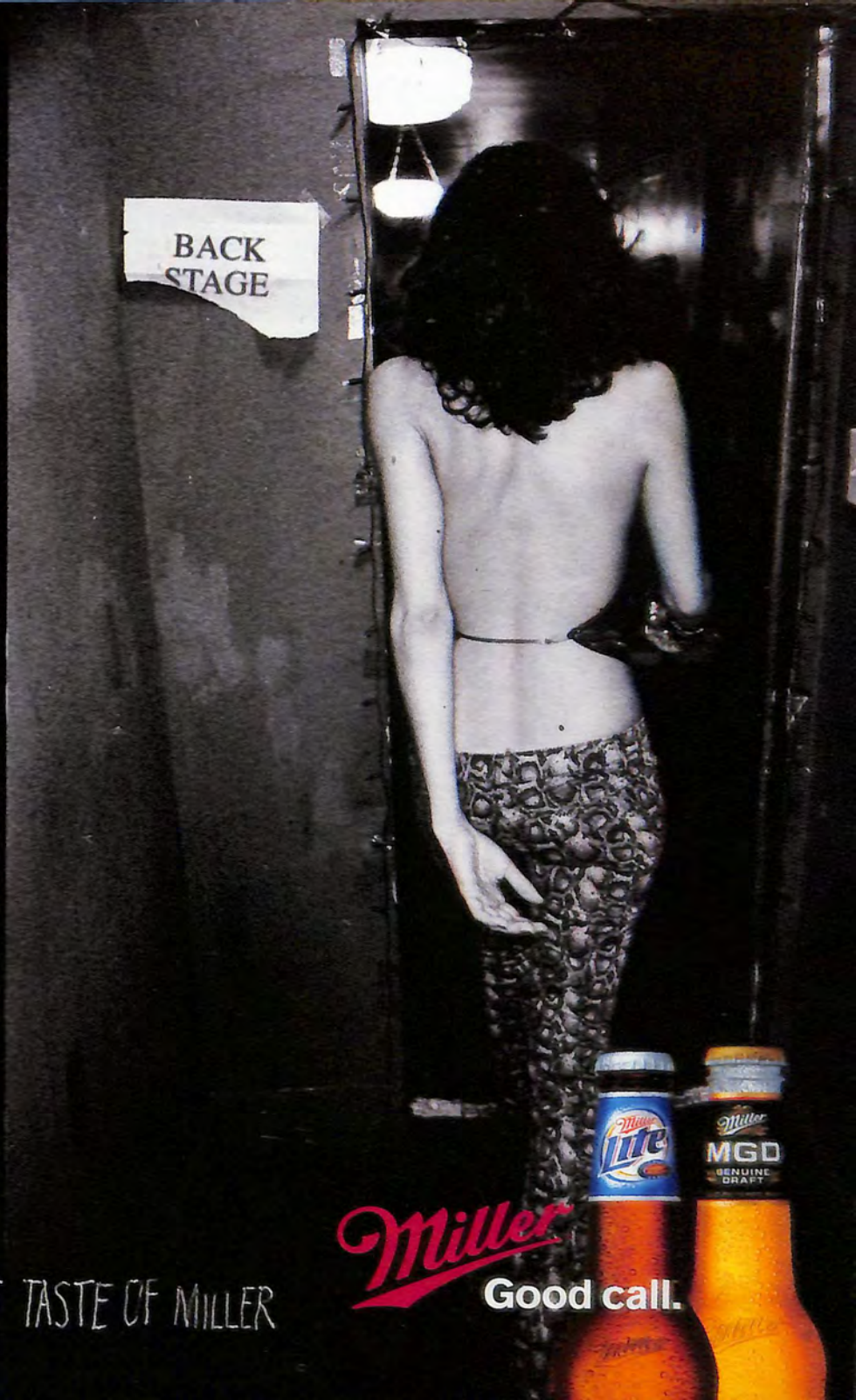
That's like beer without taste.



HERE'S TO 50 YEARS OF ROCK AND THE GREAT TASTE OF MILLER

Miller
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